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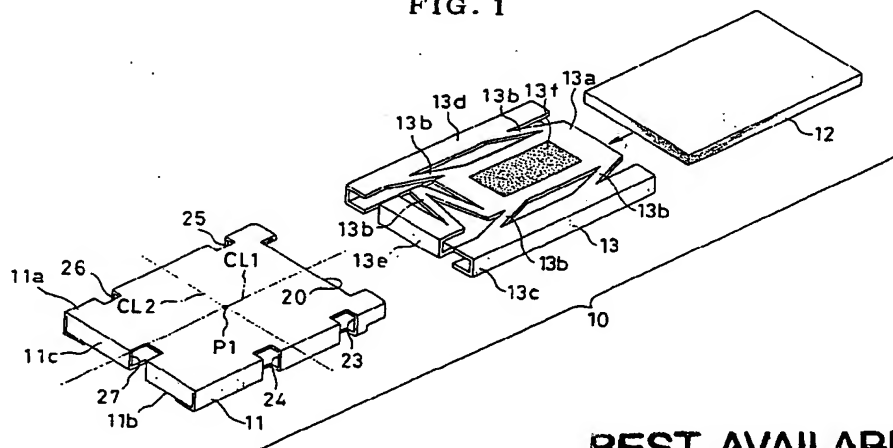
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(54) Recording sheet package and sheet supply cassette for printer

(57) A thermal printer (75) includes a thermal printer component for image recording to a thermosensitive recording sheet (12). There is a loading opening (77) through which the thermal printer component is supplied with the recording sheet. Plural guiding projections position the recording sheet in the loading opening. A recording sheet package includes a packaging case (11) for containing a stack of plural recording sheets with looseness. The loading opening is loadable with the

packaging case. A package outlet (20) is formed in the packaging case for passage of each recording sheet, and set directed toward the thermal printer component. Plural cutouts (23-27) are formed in a periphery of the packaging case, and receive the guiding projections. Blocking portions (13c-13e) of a blocking frame are disposed inside the packaging case, and close the cutouts. The blocking portions are shiftable inwards from the cutouts by the guiding projections.

FIG. 1



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Description

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

[0001] The present invention relates to a recording sheet package and a sheet supply cassette for a printer. More particularly, the present invention relates to a recording sheet package in which a stack of recording sheets can be contained in a state protected from ambient light and moisture, and a sheet supply cassette for a printer.

2. Description Related to the Prior Art

[0002] There are two types of thermal printer, including a direct thermal printing type and a thermal transfer type, for each of which recording sheet of a predetermined type is used. The recording sheet for the direct thermal printing is constituted by a support and three thermosensitive coloring layers overlaid thereon, which are cyan, magenta and yellow coloring layers. Heat energy of three values is applied to the recording sheet to develop colors of each of the coloring layers. Each coloring layer after being heated is optically fixed prior to thermal recording of a succeeding one of the coloring layers. For this optical fixation, ultraviolet rays of a predetermined range of the wavelength are applied to the recording sheet to destroy the coloring ability of each coloring layer. The succeeding coloring layer can be safely heated without influencing the density of the color developed in the preceding coloring layer. If the recording sheet of the direct thermal printing type is kept subjected to light from lamps as widely used appliances for light source, the coloring ability of the recording sheet is remarkably influenced. Consequently a stack of recording sheets is contained in a light-tight packaging bag, and furthermore contained in a cardboard box to be shipped commercially.

[0003] There are two types of thermal transfer printer, including a wax-transfer type and a sublimation type. The wax-transfer printer melts or softens ink of ink film, and transfers it to the recording sheet. The sublimation printer sublimates or disperses dye of ink film on to the recording sheet. The recording sheet for the wax-transfer printer consists of coat paper having high smoothness. The recording sheet for the sublimation printer consists of paper coated with polyester resin. For both of the thermal transfer printers, a plurality of recording sheets are stacked and contained in a moisture proof bag, which is then contained in a cardboard box to be shipped for sale.

[0004] A recording sheet package is used for easy handling of a stack of the recording sheets. To load the printer with the recording sheets, at first a packaging bag is opened to remove the recording sheet package, which is inserted in a sheet supply cassette. The sheet

supply cassette is set in the printer. So the loading of the recording sheets is complicated to most of the users. While a user manually removes the recording sheets from the packaging bag, it is likely that the recording sheets are exposed to ambient light and touched by the user's hand. In the case of the recording sheets for the thermal transfer printing, touched portions are discolored by fingerprints. In the case of the recording sheets for the direct thermal printing, the coloring ability of the uppermost one of the recording sheets is influenced by the ambient light.

[0005] JP-A 5-116774 discloses the recording sheet package in which the recording sheets are not touched directly by user's hand, and with which the printer can be easily loaded with the recording sheets. A cutting line with a train of perforations is formed in a body of the recording sheet package. A portion of the body of the recording sheet package is cut away by tearing the cutting line, to form an opening for removal of the recording sheets. The tearing requires a user's manual operation prior to the loading into the printer.

[0006] In the course of manufacturing a recording sheet package, it is difficult to insert a stack of recording sheets into a packaging case, because an ordinary type of recording sheet package accommodates the recording sheets in a state tightly contacted by the packaging case. Therefore recording sheet packages, according to the prior art, have been manufactured by use of a process of wrapping the recording sheets in a packaging case. Another problem arises in that the tight contact of the packaging case with the recording sheets considerably raises the resistance to the advance of the recording sheets. There is no smoothness in the sheet advance.

[0007] It is conceivable to provide looseness between the packaging case and the recording sheet contained therein. However a further problem arises in that the recording sheets are not positioned stably in the packaging case. The printing may be degraded, as the recording sheets may advance obliquely or may be jammed.

[0008] JP-A 9-132330 discloses a sheet supply cassette in which air tight sponge members are disposed on joining edges where a cassette portion and a lid of the cassette are fitted when closed. This is for the purpose of protecting the recording sheets from being moistened.

[0009] However the lid of this sheet supply cassette must be opened in order to supply the recording sheets. Although the inside of the sheet supply cassette is kept with sufficient tightness when closed, the moisture-proofness is lowered at the time of the supply of the recording sheet.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0010] In view of the foregoing problems, an object of the present invention is to provide a recording sheet package for a printer, wherein a stack of recording

sheets can be contained in a state protected from ambient light and moisture, and a sheet supply cassette for the printer.

[0011] Another object of the present invention is to provide a recording sheet package for a printer, wherein the recording sheet package is capable of being mounted easily on the printer, and a sheet supply cassette for the printer.

[0012] Still another object of the present invention is to provide a recording sheet package for a printer, wherein recording sheets can be protected in the course of transportation and preservation, and a sheet supply cassette for the printer.

[0013] An additional object of the present invention is to provide a recording sheet package for a printer, wherein recording sheets can be advanced while positioned stably, and a sheet supply cassette for the printer.

[0014] In order to achieve the above and other objects and advantages of this invention, a recording sheet package is provided for a printer, the printer including a printer component for image recording to a recording sheet, a loading opening through which the printer component is supplied with the recording sheet, and at least one guiding member for positioning the recording sheet in the loading opening. The recording sheet package includes a packaging case for containing a stack of plural recording sheets with looseness, the loading opening being loadable with the packaging case. A package outlet is formed in the packaging case, passable to one of the recording sheets, and set directed toward the printer component. At least one cutout is formed in a periphery of the packaging case, for receiving the guiding member. At least one blocking mechanism is disposed inside the packaging case, for closing the cutout, the blocking mechanism being shiftable inwards from the cutout by the guiding member.

[0015] In a preferred embodiment, the blocking mechanism comprises an auxiliary bag, light-tight and moisture-proof, contained in the packaging case, for containing the stack of the recording sheets with looseness.

[0016] By this construction, the stack of recording sheets can be contained in a state protected from ambient light and moisture, because the cutout is reliably closed.

[0017] In another preferred embodiment, a sheet supply cassette is provided for a printer, the printer including a printer component for image recording to a recording sheet, a loading opening through which the recording sheet is inserted into the printer component, and a supply roller for supplying the printer component with the recording sheet. The sheet supply cassette includes a cassette body, loaded in the loading opening, for containing a stack of plural recording sheets with looseness. A cassette outlet is formed in the cassette body, passable to one of the recording sheets, and set directed toward the printer component. An insertion opening is formed in the cassette body, for receiving insertion of the supply roller, for allowing contact of the supply roller

with one of the recording sheets. A bias mechanism presses the recording sheets against the supply roller by biasing the recording sheets.

[0018] In still another preferred embodiment, a cassette body contains a stack of plural recording sheets. A cassette outlet is formed in the cassette body, and passable to one of the recording sheets. A supply roller is disposed in the cassette body, for rotating to convey one of the recording sheet through the cassette outlet. A bias mechanism presses the recording sheets against the supply roller by biasing the recording sheets.

[0019] By this construction, the recording sheet package is capable of being mounted easily on the printer, because the supply roller can be caused to contact the uppermost recording sheet by use of the bias mechanism.

[0020] In another preferred embodiment, a packaging case contains a stack of plural recording sheets. A package outlet is formed in the packaging case, and passable to one of the recording sheets. An outer bag encloses the packaging case with the recording sheets with the package outlet directed substantially upwards. A suspension portion is disposed on a top edge of the outer bag, for suspension of the outer bag.

[0021] In an additional preferred embodiment, a packaging case contains a stack of plural recording sheets. A package outlet is formed in the packaging case, and passable to one of the recording sheets. An outer bag encloses the packaging case with the recording sheets with the package outlet directed substantially horizontally. A suspension portion is disposed close to a top edge of the outer bag, for suspension of the outer bag.

[0022] In another preferred embodiment, a packaging case contains a stack of plural recording sheets. A package outlet is formed in the packaging case, and passable to one of the recording sheets. An outer bag is light-tight and moisture-proof, for containing the packaging case and the recording sheets. A protection bag is folded and contained in the outer bag with the packaging case, for containing the packaging case and the recording sheets after the outer bag is opened, to protect the recording sheets. A fastener is disposed to an open portion of the protection bag, for closing the protection bag in an openable manner.

[0023] By this construction, the recording sheets can be protected in the course of transportation and preservation, because the structures and orientations of the packaging case, the outer bag and/or the protection bag are suitably determined.

[0024] In a further preferred embodiment, a packaging case contains a stack of plural recording sheets. A package outlet is formed in the packaging case, and passable to one of the recording sheets. A position setter is disposed between an inside of the packaging case and the recording sheets, for preventing the recording sheets from being loose inside the packaging case.

[0025] In another preferred embodiment, a packaging case has a substantially parallelepipedic shape, for con-

taining a stack of plural recording sheets. A package outlet is formed in the packaging case, and passable to one of the recording sheets. An inside of the packaging case has a first width, the recording sheets have a second width, the first width is smaller than the second width, and the packaging case keeps the recording sheets curved, for preventing the recording sheets from being loose therein.

[0026] By this construction, the recording sheets can be advanced while positioned stably, because the position setter or the inside of the packaging case keeps the recording sheets positioned stably.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0027] The above objects and advantages of the present invention will become more apparent from the following detailed description when read in connection with the accompanying drawings, in which:

Fig. 1 is an exploded perspective illustrating a recording sheet package or cartridge of the present invention;

Fig. 2 is a vertical section illustrating the recording sheet package;

Fig. 3 is an exploded perspective illustrating the recording sheet package;

Fig. 4 is a perspective illustrating a spread state of a packaging case;

Fig. 5 is a perspective illustrating a sheet supply cassette;

Fig. 6 is a perspective illustrating the sheet supply cassette and the recording sheet package;

Fig. 7 is a vertical section illustrating the sheet supply cassette at a loading opening of a thermal printer;

Fig. 8 is a cross section illustrating the sheet supply cassette containing the recording sheet package;

Fig. 9 is a vertical section illustrating the same as Fig. 7 but in which the remaining sheets are decreasing;

Fig. 10 is a perspective illustrating the thermal printer;

Fig. 11 is a perspective illustrating another preferred blocking mechanism including three blocking members;

Fig. 12 is an exploded perspective illustrating another preferred recording sheet package with an auxiliary bag;

Fig. 13 is a perspective illustrating a further preferred recording sheet package without a blocking mechanism;

Fig. 14 is a plan illustrating the recording sheet package of Fig. 13;

Fig. 15 is a vertical section illustrating the recording sheet package;

Fig. 16 is a perspective illustrating a spread state of a packaging case;

Fig. 17 is a perspective illustrating another preferred sheet supply cassette;

Fig. 18 is a vertical section illustrating the sheet supply cassette at the loading opening of the thermal printer;

Fig. 19 is a vertical section illustrating the same as Fig. 18 but in which the remaining sheets are decreasing;

Fig. 20 is a cross section illustrating the sheet supply cassette containing the recording sheet package;

Fig. 21 is a vertical section illustrating still another preferred sheet supply cassette having a supply roller;

Fig. 22 is a perspective illustrating a different sheet supply cassette in which a lid has a smaller size;

Fig. 23 is a vertical section illustrating a different sheet supply cassette having a supply roller;

Fig. 24 is an exploded perspective illustrating a recording sheet package where a packaging case is being removed from an outer bag;

Fig. 25 is an exploded perspective illustrating the packaging case and recording sheets;

Fig. 26 is a perspective illustrating a spread state of the packaging case;

Fig. 27 is a vertical section illustrating the recording sheet cartridge;

Fig. 28 is a perspective illustrating the same as Fig. 27 handled horizontally;

Fig. 29 is a perspective illustrating the same as Figs. 27 and 28 but handled vertically;

Figs. 30-32 are exploded perspectives illustrating different preferred recording sheet packages;

Fig. 33 is a perspective illustrating a spread state of a packaging case;

Fig. 34 is a perspective illustrating still another preferred recording sheet cartridge or package having position setter projections;

Fig. 35 is a vertical section illustrating the recording sheet package of Fig. 34;

Fig. 36 is a perspective illustrating a spread state of a packaging case;

Fig. 37 is a perspective illustrating the sheet supply cassette and the recording sheet package;

Fig. 38 is a vertical section illustrating the sheet supply cassette at the loading opening of the thermal printer;

Figs. 39 and 40 are perspectives illustrating recording sheet packages having another preferred position setter;

Fig. 41 is an exploded perspective illustrating another preferred packaging case and recording sheets; and

Fig. 42 is a front elevation illustrating a recording sheet package according to Fig. 41.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT(S) OF THE PRESENT INVENTION

[0028] In Figs. 1 and 2, a recording sheet package 10 or cartridge is constituted by a packaging case 11, thermosensitive recording sheets 12 and a blocking frame 13 positioned between the packaging case 11 and the recording sheets 12. The recording sheet package 10 is in a thin box shape, and produced from dust proof paper or cardboard with a great thickness and made of long fiber. The blocking frame 13 is also produced from dust proof paper or cardboard. The use of this type of paper is effective in avoiding creation of dust of paper in the course of cutting the paper or supply of a recording sheet. The printing is not influenced by the use of the packaging case 11 of the paper.

[0029] In Fig. 2, a stack of the 20 thermosensitive recording sheets 12 of a direct thermal printing type is contained in the packaging case 11. The recording sheets 12 are contained in the packaging case 11 by directing their recording surface downwards and their back surface upwards. If the recording sheets 12 are thermal printing stickers having an adhesive layer, the recording sheets 12 have a greater thickness so that a stack of only ten (10) recording sheets 12 is contained in the packaging case 11. Of course the number of the recording sheets 12 to be contained can be changed suitably in consideration of the thickness of the recording sheets 12. A protective sheet 12a is additionally disposed under the lowest one of the recording sheets 12. The protective sheet 12a tightly contacts the recording surface of the lowest one of the recording sheets 12, and shields the recording surface from moisture and ambient light. Note that it is possible to omit the protective sheet 12a.

[0030] In Fig. 3, an outer bag 14 is used to contain the recording sheet package 10 for retail sale, and has light-shielding and moisture-proof characteristics. To use the recording sheet package 10, a vertical edge portion 14a of the outer bag 14 is torn away along a cutting line 15 to cut open the outer bag 14. A fastener 16 of synthetic resin is disposed in the vicinity of a cut edge 14b of the outer bag 14. The outer bag 14 is used again by opening and closing the fastener 16 for the purpose of preserving the recording sheet package 10 partially used. The fastener 16 is well-known in the art, and consists of a combination of a groove-formed ridge and a ridge fitted therein for tightly enclosing the inside of the outer bag 14. A suspension hole 17 is formed in the top end of the outer bag 14, and receives insertion of a suspension hook 18 for commercial display of products, so that the outer bag 14 is suspended on the suspension hook 18 for sale in a store.

[0031] In Fig. 4, the packaging case 11 is constituted of one top plate 11a, one bottom plate 11b, one end plate 11c and two lateral plates 11d and 11e. The top and bottom plates 11a and 11b are rectangular and slightly larger than the recording sheets 12. The combination of the plates 11a-11e is bent by use of bend lines 19 in an erect

manner to constitute the packaging case 11 in the thin box shape.

[0032] In Fig. 1, a package outlet 20 is formed in the packaging case 11 to lie in a shorter side line of the packaging case 11. A roller receiving slot 22 is formed in the packaging case 11 along an edge between the top plate 11a and a push plate 11h (See Fig. 4), communicates with the package outlet 20, and receives a supply roller 21 (See Fig. 9) of the thermal printer. The roller receiving slot 22 is defined by forming an opening in a spread sheet from which the packaging case 11 has been produced.

[0033] Cutouts 23-27 are formed in the lateral plates 11d and 11e and the end plate 11c. The cutouts 23-27 are defined by partially cutting the top and bottom plates 11a and 11b in addition to cutting of the lateral plates 11d and 11e and the end plate 11c.

[0034] Among the cutouts 23-27 in Fig. 1, the cutouts 24, 26 and 27 are formed in positions asymmetric with respect to a reference line CL1, which is directed in a supply direction of the recording sheets 12 and passes the center P of the packaging case 11. The cutouts 23 and 25 are positioned symmetrically with respect to the reference line CL1. The cutouts 23 and 24 are formed in positions asymmetric with respect to a reference line CL2, which is perpendicular to the supply direction of the recording sheets 12 and passes the center P of the packaging case 11. The cutouts 25 and 26 are positioned symmetrically with respect to the reference line CL2.

[0035] In Fig. 4, a spread state of the packaging case 11 is illustrated. The lateral plates 11d and 11e are arranged connectively with the top plate 11a via the bend lines 19. Securing plates 11f and 11g are arranged connectively with the lateral plates 11d and 11e via the bend lines 19. The end plate 11c communicates with a shorter side line of the top plate 11a opposite to the package outlet 20. Also the end plate 11c communicates with the bottom plate 11b. The push plate 11h communicates with a shorter side line of the top plate 11a at the package outlet 20 via a bend line 30.

[0036] In Fig. 2, the push plate 11h is bent at an angle of approximately 180 degrees via the bend line 30 to lie under the top plate 11a. In Fig. 4, an adhesive layer 31 is formed by applying adhesive agent to regions of the securing plates 11f and 11g in contact with the bottom plate 11b in the vicinity of the end opposite to the package outlet 20. The adhesive layer 31 keeps the packaging case 11 shaped like a box.

[0037] A pair of slits 28 are formed in the bottom plate 11b to extend in the sheet supply direction. A movable portion 29 is defined between the slits 28. As will be described with Fig. 9, the movable portion 29 is pushed up by a lifter plate 57 according to a decrease of the recording sheets 12 remaining in the packaging case 11.

[0038] In Fig. 1, the packaging case 11 accommodates the 20 recording sheets 12 in contact with the blocking frame 13. The periphery of the recording

sheets 12 is covered by the blocking frame 13, which is constituted by an attaching plate 13a, deformable portions 13b, and blocking portions 13c, 13d and 13e or position setter portions. The attaching plate 13a has an adhesive layer 13f, which attaches the attaching plate 13a to the bottom face of the top plate 11a of the packaging case 11.

[0039] The blocking portions 13c-13e have a channel shape as viewed in cross section, and are arranged to cover three sides lines of the stack of the recording sheets 12, but not to cover one side line positioned in the package outlet 20. The blocking portions 13c and 13d cover the lateral sides of the recording sheets 12. The blocking portion 13e covers the end side of the recording sheets 12. As the blocking portions 13c-13e close the cutouts 23-27 of the packaging case 11, entry of light and moisture into the packaging case 11 is avoided, to keep the packaging case 11 shielded from light and moisture.

[0040] The deformable portions 13b are constituted by plates of a small width, and disposed between the attaching plate 13a and the blocking portions 13c-13e to extend obliquely or in a zigzag. The blocking portions 13c-13e have a characteristic of springs. As will be described later, guiding projections 50, 51, 52, 53 and 54 enter the cutouts 23-27 when the recording sheet package 10 is loaded in a sheet supply cassette 40, and push the blocking portions 13c-13e toward the inside by deforming the deformable portions 13b. Then the recording sheets 12 are appropriately set in the supply position.

[0041] Thus the blocking frame 13 avoids entry of light and moisture through the cutouts 23-27. The light-shielded and moisture-shielded state of the packaging case 11 is not degraded even with the cutouts 23-27 formed in the packaging case 11. As illustrated in Fig. 2, the push plate 11h biases the recording sheets 12 toward the bottom plate 11b in the state contained in the packaging case 11, so the recording sheets 12 are contacted tightly on one another. Thus there is little external moisture coming to the recording surface of the recording sheets 12, which can be shielded from moisture with further effectiveness.

[0042] In Figs. 6 and 7, a sheet supply cassette 40 to contain the recording sheet package 10 is illustrated. A cassette body of the sheet supply cassette 40 is constituted by a cassette portion 41 and a lid 42, and generally has a box shape.

[0043] The lid 42 is supported on the cassette portion 41 in a rotatable manner about an axis defined by a pivot 43, and is openable within an angle range of approximately 90 degrees. In Fig. 6, a package chamber 44 of the cassette portion 41 is loaded with the recording sheet package 10 while the lid 42 is kept open erectly. When the lid 42 is closed, retainer claws 45 and 46 in Fig. 7 are engaged with each other to keep the lid 42 closed. To open the lid 42, an unlocking plate 47 is pushed to disengage the retainer claw 45 from the re-

tainer claw 46, so that the lid 42 is rendered openable. The unlocking plate 47 is kept slidable in the supply direction by slide supporting shafts 47a on a base plate 48. The unlocking plate 47 is biased by a coil spring 47b in a direction of engaging the retainer claws 45 and 46.

[0044] In Fig. 6, the package chamber 44 has a slightly greater area than the recording sheet package 10 so as to facilitate the loading operation. Guiding projections 50-54 are arranged on the base plate 48 of the package chamber 44 in positions of the cutouts 23-27. The guiding projections 50-54 respectively have a rectangular shape, and are provided with a guide face 55 on the top. The guide face 55 is inclined, and causes the guiding projections 50-54 smoothly to enter the cutouts 23-27.

[0045] When the recording sheet package 10 is set in the package chamber 44 in the correct position, the guiding projections 50-54 enter the cutouts 23-27 to allow loading the recording sheet package 10 in the package chamber 44. If the recording sheet package 10 is set in the package chamber 44 with a left lateral side of the recording sheet package 10 oriented to the right, or with its front edge oriented to the rear, then the guiding projections 50-54 are not positioned at the cutouts 23-27. The recording sheet package 10 cannot be inserted and can be found to be incorrectly set. A user is enabled to reinsert the recording sheet package 10 in the package chamber 44 by correcting the orientation of the recording sheet package 10.

[0046] The guiding projections 50-53 are laterally disposed as two pairs. In Fig. 8, let W1 be a distance from the level of the guiding projections 50 and 51 to the level of the guiding projections 52 and 53. The distance W1 is determined slightly greater than the width of the recording sheets. Thus the lateral sides of the recording sheets 12 are neatly set in contact with the blocking portions 13c and 13d by entry of the guiding projections 50-53 into the packaging case 11 through the cutouts 23-26. Also the recording sheets 12 are positioned in the direction crosswise to the supply direction of the recording sheets 12, no matter how loosely the packaging case 11 has initially been containing the recording sheets 12. The recording sheets 12 are prevented from being jammed or provided with an obliquely printed image, as the recording sheets 12 do not move obliquely.

[0047] In Fig. 7, the rear edges of the recording sheets 12 are arranged neatly in contact with the blocking portions 13e by the guiding projection 54 which is located opposite to a cassette outlet 60. The guiding projection 54 also tightly positions the recording sheets 12 in the supply direction. If the recording sheets 12 are loosely contained in the packaging case 11, setting of the recording sheet package 10 in the sheet supply cassette 40 automatically tightens the recording sheets 12 in the supply direction.

[0048] The lifter plate 57 is disposed in the package chamber 44, and is supported on the base plate 48 rotatably about an axis defined by a pivot 58. The lifter plate 57 is biased upwards by a coil spring 59 as bias

mechanism, to push up the movable portion 29 of the packaging case 11.

[0049] A gap is formed between the cassette portion 41 and the lid 42 in the vicinity of the pivot 43 while the lid 42 is closed. This gap constitutes the cassette outlet 60. A light-shielding plate 61 is disposed in a path near to the cassette outlet 60 on the side of the lid 42. The light-shielding plate 61 is a spring plate which biases the recording sheets 12 toward a wall of the path on the side of the cassette portion 41.

[0050] A sheet separator 62 is disposed to project in a supply path near to the cassette outlet 60 on the side of the cassette portion 41. A cork member 63 is attached to the surface of the sheet separator 62. When two of the recording sheets 12 remain overlapped on one another while supplied, the cork member 63 frictionally stops the lower one of the two of the recording sheets 12 from advancing. Thus only the uppermost one of the recording sheets 12 is allowed to advance each time. Furthermore, the sheet separator 62 has two separator projections 64 for avoiding double supply of the recording sheets 12. The separator projections 64 contact the lower one of the two of the recording sheets 12, to stop it from advancing.

[0051] In Fig. 9, insertion openings 65 are formed in the lid 42 in positions corresponding to the roller receiving slot 22 in the recording sheet package 10. In a thermal printer 75, the sheet supply cassette 40 is set, so as to cause portions of the supply roller 21 to enter the insertion openings 65. The supply roller 21 contacts the uppermost one of the recording sheets 12 in the recording sheet package 10. The supply roller 21 rotates in the supply direction in the course of printing. Thus only the uppermost one of the recording sheets 12 is advanced from the recording sheet package 10 toward a printing stage in the thermal printer 75.

[0052] In Figs. 5 and 9, a top face of the lid 42 consists of an ejection tray. Sheet guide walls 66 and 67 and a stopper wall 68 are disposed on the lid 42. The sheet guide walls 66 and 67 regulate lateral sides of an ejected one of the recording sheets 12, and lie along the longer side lines of the lid 42. The stopper wall 68 prevents the ejected one of the recording sheets 12 from dropping away from the lid 42 by contacting an advancing edge of the recording sheets 12.

[0053] In Fig. 10, the thermal printer 75 with the sheet supply cassette 40 is illustrated. A front face 76 of the thermal printer 75 has a loading opening 77, into which the sheet supply cassette 40 is inserted. In Fig. 9, portions of the supply roller 21 in the loading opening 77 enter the insertion openings 65 in the lid 42 when the sheet supply cassette 40 is set in the loading opening 77. As the recording sheets 12 in the sheet supply cassette 40 are kept pushed up by the lifter plate 57, the uppermost one of the recording sheets 12 contacts the supply roller 21.

[0054] The front face 76 has the loading opening 77 with an operation panel 78, a liquid crystal display (LCD)

panel 79, an IC card insertion port 80, a smart media insertion port 81 and a power switch 82. When the operation panel 78 is operated to enter printing instructions, an image to be printed is displayed in the LCD panel 79. After checking the displayed image, a printing key in the operation panel 78 is operated to start printing.

[0055] For the printing, the supply roller 21 is rotated in the supply direction at first. The uppermost one of the recording sheets 12 is advanced and supplied into the thermal printer 75. A thermal head is driven to print an image to the one of the recording sheets 12 in the three-color frame-sequential recording. The image is recorded one line after another. The thermal head is driven for each pixel to be recorded in synchronism with the conveyance of the one of the recording sheets 12. Also an ultraviolet lamp is driven upon the thermal recording for the color having been recorded. Thus the image of this color is fixed, not to develop color further in the following steps of the recording. After the three-color frame-sequential recording, the one of the recording sheets 12 in Fig. 9 is ejected by ejector rollers 74 to the lid 42 of the sheet supply cassette 40, to finish the printing operation.

[0056] To load the sheet supply cassette 40 with the recording sheet package 10, at first the sheet supply cassette 40 is removed from the loading opening 77 in the thermal printer 75. In Fig. 6, the lid 42 is opened. If the packaging case 11 emptied after the previous use remains in the sheet supply cassette 40, the packaging case 11 is removed before the recording sheet package 10 is inserted. The cutouts 23-27 in the packaging case 11 are positioned at each of the guiding projections 50-54 of the package chamber 44. Therefore, the recording sheet package 10 is correctly set in the package chamber 44.

[0057] If the recording sheet package 10 is erroneously oriented to be set in the package chamber 44, for example if a left lateral side of the recording sheet package 10 is oriented to the right, or its front edge is oriented to the rear, then at least one of the guiding projections 50-54 is not received in the cutouts 23-27 but interferes with the periphery of the recording sheet package 10. Thus the recording sheet package 10 can be set in a correct orientation in the package chamber 44. No wasteful recording operation occurs. Recording heat is prevented from being applied to the back surface of the recording sheet 12. The heating element array of the thermal head would be damaged if they should heat the back surface of the recording sheet 12. But the heating element array are protected from being damaged in accordance with the present invention.

[0058] At the time of inserting the recording sheet package 10 into the package chamber 44, the guiding projections 50-54 of the package chamber 44 enter the cutouts 23-27. The edges of the recording sheets 12 are pushed and neaten in contact with the blocking portions 13c-13e by the inside of the guiding projections 50-54. The recording sheets 12 can be set exactly in the

supply position. Even though the recording sheets 12 are loose with reference to the inside of the packaging case 11, the recording sheets 12 are regulated by the guiding projections 50-54 upon the loading of the recording sheet package 10 when set in the supply position.

[0059] In Fig. 9, only a very small number of the recording sheets 12 remain. The lifter plate 57 raises the movable portion 29 of the packaging case 11. The push plate 11h pushes down the uppermost one of the recording sheets 12. Thus the remaining recording sheets 12 can be kept in contact with one another while laid on one another. The recording surface of the recording sheets 12 is all directed downwards. The protective sheet 12a is disposed on the lowest one of the recording sheets 12. Thus the recording surface is protected from being directly subjected to air, and shielded from moisture and light without considerable failure. The bottom plate 11b does not have an opening. The movable portion 29 as a part of the bottom plate 11b is movable up according to the use of the recording sheets 12. Thus no dust enters through the bottom plate 11b. There is no failure in the operation of the bottom plate 11b to shield moisture and light. The cutouts 23-27 are blocked by the blocking portions 13c-13e. Thus entry of light or moisture into the cutouts 23-27 is avoided. Moisture and light can be reliably shielded.

[0060] If the recording sheets 12 are replaced with thermal printing stickers having the greater thickness, the recording sheet package is replaced. In Fig. 11, the sheet supply cassette 40 is removed from the thermal printer 75, and opened. The recording sheet package 10 partially used is ejected, instead of which a new recording sheet package 10 is inserted.

[0061] In Fig. 9, the push plate 11h pushes the recording sheets 12 toward the bottom plate 11b no matter how few the remaining sheets among the recording sheets 12 contained in the recording sheet package from the sheet supply cassette 40. Thus the recording sheets 12 are squeezed between the push plate 11h and the bottom plate 11b. The recording sheets 12 are reliably kept from dropping out of the packaging case 11. Note the recording sheet package 10 being removed can be preserved in the light-shielded and moisture-shielded state, as the recording sheet package 10 is re-contained in the outer bag 14 of Fig. 3 and enclosed therein by closing the fastener 16.

[0062] In the above embodiment, the blocking frame 13 is constituted by the attaching plate 13a, the blocking portions 13c-13e, and the deformable portions 13b connecting the blocking portions 13c-13e to the attaching plate 13a. Alternatively, a blocking member 85 or position setter member, illustrated in Fig. 11, may include a deformable portion 85a defined by a channel-shaped slot 88. A blocking member 86 may include a deformable portion 86a defined by the channel-shaped slot 88. A blocking member 87 may have a deformable portion 87a as an extended end. The deformable portions 85a,

86a and 87a may be attached to a packaging case by an attaching portion 89 with an adhesive layer. Furthermore, the deformable portions 85a, 86a and 87a may be separate members, and may be attached to the packaging case and to blocking members. In the above embodiments, the blocking members and the deformable portions are produced from paper or cardboard. Alternatively, the blocking members and the deformable portions may be produced from plastic.

[0063] In the above embodiments, the cutouts 23-27 are blocked by the blocking portions 13c-13e and the blocking members 85-87. Alternatively, a recording sheet package 91 or cartridge can contain an auxiliary blocking bag 90 or position setter bag as illustrated in Fig. 12. The auxiliary blocking bag 90 block the cutouts 23-27, and also contains the recording sheets 12 loosely. The auxiliary blocking bag 90 may be preferably produced from a thin soft sheet of plastic material having light-shielding and moisture-proof characteristics. There are attaching portions 92 with an adhesive layer on the auxiliary blocking bag 90, which is attached to the end plate 11c of the packaging case 11 by the attaching portions 92. Note that elements similar to those of the above embodiment of Fig. 1 are designated with identical reference numerals, and are not described any further. It is also possible to dispose an adhesive layer (not shown) at an open end of the auxiliary blocking bag 90 for attaching the auxiliary blocking bag 90 to the packaging case.

[0064] In Figs. 13-23, preferred sheet supply cassettes are described, in which recording sheets are advantageously separated from one another. In Figs. 13 and 14, a recording sheet package 100 or cartridge includes a packaging case 110, which is in a thin box shape, and produced from dust proof paper or cardboard with a great thickness and made of long fiber.

[0065] In Fig. 15, the packaging case 110 contains the stack of the recording sheets 12. The push plate 11h biases the recording sheets 12 toward the bottom plate 11b in the state contained in the packaging case 110, so the recording sheets 12 are contacted tightly on one another. Thus there is little external moisture coming to the recording surface of the recording sheets 12, which can be shielded from moisture with further effectiveness.

[0066] In Figs. 15 and 16, the adhesive layer 31 keeps the packaging case 11 shaped like a box. The regions with the adhesive layer 31 are not the entire surface of the securing plates 11f and 11g. A length of those regions of the adhesive layer 31 is at least 1/3 as great as a length of the longer side line of the packaging case 11, and at most 1/2 as great as the same. The remainder of the securing plates 11f and 11g is not attached but free from the remaining portion of the bottom plate 11b, which operates like a movable flap.

[0067] In Fig. 18, the cassette outlet 60 is formed between the cassette portion 41 and the lid 42 in the vicinity of the pivot 43 while the lid 42 is closed. A light-shielding

plate 111 is secured to the lid 42 by a securing rod 111a. The light-shielding plate 111 is a spring plate, which is defined by bending a resilient plate in a corrugated manner, and includes bend portions 111b. The bend portions 111b bias the recording sheets 12 toward the wall of the path on the side of the cassette portion 41.

[0068] The bend portions 111b are extended in forward and backward directions from the securing rod 111a along the supply path. The bend portions 111b contact the wall on the side of the cassette portion, and close the cassette outlet 60 in a tight manner. Thus entry of dust is avoided. Entry of light and moisture is avoided in a more reliable manner. As the two bend portions 111b are ready to operate for the closing, at least one of the bend portions 111b closes the path if each of the two ends of the recording sheet passes the light-shielding plate 111 and flexes the bend portions 111b.

[0069] A sheet separator 112 is disposed to project over the cassette portion 41 near to the cassette outlet 60. A cork member 113 is attached to the surface of the sheet separator 112. The cork member 113 covers substantially the entirety of the top of the sheet separator 112. However the cork member 113 may be attached only to the center of the sheet separator 112 to be contacted by the recording sheet 12.

[0070] In Figs. 17-19, a stopper wall 118 is provided with a sheet remainder counter 120, which appears in a face of the stopper wall 118 opposite to the cassette outlet 60, and indicates an amount of the remainder of the recording sheets 12.

[0071] In Fig. 20, the sheet remainder counter 120 is constituted by gradation sign trains 121 and 122 and a pointer 123 for pointing the gradation sign trains 121 and 122. Pointer ends 123a and 123b are disposed on the top of the pointer 123. A transparent plate 118a or ultraviolet ray cut filter is disposed in front of the pointer ends 123a and 123b for the purpose of allowing external observation of the pointer ends 123a and 123b. Therefore, it is possible to avoid entry of ultraviolet rays into the sheet supply cassette 40 which are harmful to the coloring ability of the recording sheets 12.

[0072] The pointer 123 is disposed in a manner movable inside the stopper wall 118 in a thickness direction of the recording sheets 12. While the lid 42 is closed, the weight of the pointer 123 keeps its bottom end 123c in contact with an uppermost one of the recording sheets 12 through the cutout 27.

[0073] The gradation sign trains 121 and 122 are arranged in the right and left to the pointer 123. The gradation sign train 121 constitutes a scale for the recording sheets 12 of an ordinary type, and is "20" down to "0" (zero). The gradation sign train 122 constitutes a scale for thermal printing stickers having a greater thickness, and is "10" down to "0" (zero).

[0074] In Fig. 18, there is a click retainer member 133 for engagement with a clicking operation in order to keeping the sheet supply cassette 40 retained on the thermal printer without dropping.

[0075] In Figs. 17-19, insertion openings 115 according to the present embodiment are formed in the lid 42 for entry of the supply roller 21. Furthermore, a sheet supply cassette, as illustrated in Fig. 21, may include a supply roller 142 disposed in a lid 141 closing a cassette portion 140. A gear 142a may be associated with the supply roller 142, and driven to rotate by a mechanism in a thermal printer. The lid 141 does not have the insertion openings 115 according to Fig. 17. Thus the sheet supply cassette can have a more reliable light-shielded and moisture-shielded state. Note that the supply roller 142 in Fig. 21 consists of a single roller portion. Alternatively, a supply roller may be a multiple-roller type, including a shaft and a plurality of roller portions having a small width and an equal diameter and arranged in line and coaxially about the shaft. Also sponge members of an air-tight type can be disposed in joint edges of the cassette portion and the lid, to ensure the moisture-proofness and light-shielding ability.

[0076] In the above embodiment, the lid 42 has nearly the same size as that of the cassette portion 41. Alternatively a sheet supply cassette, as illustrated in Fig. 22, can be constructed with a lid 143 having a size enough to cover a part of a cassette portion 144. The lid 143 is disposed on the cassette portion 144 in an openable manner in connection with a pivot 145 or a hinge mechanism. The cassette portion 144 is provided with the insertion openings 115 formed therein. Furthermore, a sheet supply cassette of a roller-built-in type, as illustrated in Fig. 23, can be so constructed that a lid 146 has a size enough to cover a part of a cassette portion 147. Note that the cassette portion 147 is provided with a supply roller 148 supported in a rotatable manner therein.

[0077] In the above embodiments, the recording sheets 12 are loaded in the sheet supply cassette 40 in a state contained in the recording sheet package 100. However the package chamber 44 of a thermal printer may be loaded with the recording sheets 12 directly without the use of the packaging case 110.

[0078] In the above embodiments, the insertion openings 115 are formed through portions of the lid. Alternatively insertion recesses or gaps for insertion of the supply roller 21 may be formed in the lid by cutting its corners or portions along its edges.

[0079] In the above embodiments, the cassette body includes the cassette portion and the lid. Alternatively a cassette body may be a single inseparable member loadable in the loading opening of the printer, and may consist of a tray, plate or receptacle of any suitable type without a lid, or a box, drawer or holder of any suitable type having only one open end as the cassette outlet.

[0080] In Figs. 24-33, other preferred recording sheet packages are described, in which packaging material can have suitability for protection of the recording sheets in the course of transportation and preservation. In Fig. 24, a recording sheet package 209 is constituted of a recording sheet cartridge 210 and an outer bag 213 for

containing the recording sheet cartridge 210. In Fig. 25, the recording sheet cartridge 210 is constituted by a packaging case 211 or case and thermosensitive recording sheets 212 contained therein. The recording sheet cartridge 210 is formed from cardboard or paper, but may be formed from plastic material.

[0081] In Fig. 24, the outer bag 213 is used to contain the recording sheet cartridge 210 for retail sale, and has light-shielding and moisture-proof characteristics. To use the recording sheet cartridge 210, a vertical edge portion 213a of the outer bag 213 is torn away along a cutting line 220, to open the outer bag 213 along a cut edge 221. The outer bag 213 is produced from an aluminum-laminated sheet with the light-shielding and moisture-proof characteristics.

[0082] A first direction indicia 225 is printed on each of the front and rear surfaces of the outer bag 213, has a shape of an arrow, and is directed to a position of a package outlet 214 of the recording sheet cartridge 210. There are information printed on the surfaces of the outer bag 213 to represent the sheet type, the manufacturer name, notice to users and the like in relation to the recording sheets. A second direction indicia 226 is printed in a position under the first direction indicia 225, and is an image of the entirety of the recording sheet cartridge 210 with a reduced size. The second direction indicia 226 is also useful for recognizing the direction of the package outlet 214 in an apparent manner. It is to be noted that, instead of the use of both the direction indicia 225 and 226, only one of them may be printed without printing the remainder.

[0083] To unseal the package, a user checks the direction indicia 225 and 226 for the orientation of the recording sheet cartridge 210, and keeps the package outlet 214 of the recording sheet cartridge 210 oriented exactly upwards or obliquely upwards when the vertical edge portion 213a is torn. In Fig. 28, the cut edge 221 is directed horizontally or obliquely upwards. In Fig. 29, the cut edge 221 is directed upwards. The recording sheet cartridge 210 is removed from the outer bag 213 while keeping the state of Fig. 28 or 29. The recording sheet cartridge 210 is set in the sheet supply cassette or thermal printer while the package outlet 214 is directed upwards to keep the recording sheets 212 from dropping out of the packaging case 211.

[0084] In Fig. 24, the recording sheet cartridge 210 is so oriented as to direct the package outlet 214 upward in the outer bag 213. A suspension hole 223 is formed in the top end of the outer bag 213. A suspension hook 224 is used in a store for commercial display, and suspends the outer bag 213 at the suspension hole 223. In the packaging case 211, the lower edges of the recording sheets 212 are kept aligned by the weight of the recording sheets 212. Therefore, it is unnecessary to neat- en the edges of the recording sheets 212 when the recording sheet cartridge 210 is pulled out of the outer bag 213. The recording sheet cartridge 210 with the recording sheets 212 can be set in the thermal printer or sheet

supply cassette easily.

[0085] A fastener 222 and the cutting line 220 according to the present embodiment are located along one of the vertical edges of the outer bag 213. Furthermore, a recording sheet package 233 or cartridge, as illustrated in Fig. 30, can have a cutting line 231 and a fastener 232 both along a top edge of an outer bag 230. The cutting line 231 has a cutting notch formed in the outer bag 230 at a point along the left vertical edge. Elements similar to those of the embodiment of Fig. 24 are designated with identical reference numerals.

[0086] Furthermore, the recording sheet cartridge 210 may be oriented to direct the package outlet 214 horizontally while contained in an outer bag 235 as illustrated in Fig. 31. A suspension hole 236 is formed in a top edge of the outer bag 235. A cutting line at the top edge 237 is located under the suspension hole 236. A fastener 238 is located under the cutting line. The top edge 237 of the outer bag 213 is cut, before the fastener 238 is opened to remove the recording sheet cartridge 210 from the suspension hole 236. This construction is advantageous in that the outer bag 235 can be unsealed in a convenient orientation. There occurs no accident of dropping the recording sheet cartridge 210 out of the outer bag, or dropping the recording sheets 212 out of the packaging case 211.

[0087] In spite of the above advantages of the embodiments, mass production of the fastener 222 is involved with difficulties particularly because of the use of the aluminum-laminated sheet material for the outer bag 213. Or else the moisture shielding ability of the outer bag 213 may become low if there is no effective structure for reliably closing the outer bag 213. In view of this, a recording sheet package 240 in Fig. 32 is constructed with suitability for mass production and moisture shielding ability. The recording sheet package 240 is a combination of a light-tight outer bag 241, the recording sheet cartridge 210 and a protection bag 243. The protection bag 243 is initially folded in two halves, roughly wraps the recording sheet cartridge 210, and preinserted into the outer bag 241 before being enclosed for shipment. The protection bag 243 is provided with a fastener 244, and is produced from polyethylene terephthalate (PET), the use of which is advantageous because of a low manufacturing cost even with the fastener 244. A user, after unsealing the recording sheet package 240, uses the recording sheet cartridge 210 partially, and may wish to preserve the recording sheet cartridge 210 before being used completely. It is possible to accommodate the recording sheet cartridge 210 into the protection bag 243, close the fastener 244, tightly envelop the recording sheet cartridge 210 in the fastener 244, then inserts them into the outer bag 241. Thus the recording sheets 212 can be preserved in the light-shielded and moisture-shielded state. This embodiment is effective in reducing the cost of the recording sheet package 240 because of the use of the elements available as products of mass production.

[0088] In the above embodiments, the suspension hole 223, 236 is formed in the outer bag 213. Alternatively, a suspension hook (not shown) may be formed with an outer bag. In Fig. 26, the packaging case 211 is in a thin box shape, and has one open end having the package outlet 214. However the push plate 11h can be connected with the top plate 11a along a bend line 251 in a packaging case 250 of Fig. 33. A roller receiving slot 249 is formed in the packaging case 250. Elements similar to those of Fig. 26 are designated with identical reference numerals. The push plate 11h is bent at an angle of approximately 180 degrees via the bend line 251 to lie under the top plate 11a. The push plate 11h biases the recording sheets 212 toward the bottom plate 11b in the state contained in the packaging case 250, so the recording sheets 212 are contacted tightly on one another.

[0089] Instead of the packaging case 250 of Fig. 33, the packaging case 110 of Fig. 16 may be packaged as illustrated in Figs. 24-32. The packaging case 110 is nearly the same as the packaging case 250, but includes the cutouts 23-27. In the loading into the thermal printer or the sheet supply cassette, guiding members are inserted into the packaging case 110 through the cutouts 23-27, and neatly set the recording sheets 212 of the packaging case 110 in the sheet supply position. Even though the recording sheets 212 are loosely contained in the packaging case 110, setting of the recording sheet package in the sheet supply cassette automatically tightens the recording sheets 212 in the supply direction.

[0090] Furthermore, a roll type of a continuous recording sheet may be packaged in a recording material package according to the present invention.

[0091] The fastener 16, 222, 232, 238, 244 is produced from plastic material and includes a combination of the ridges. Also any type of fastener may be used, that can be opened and closed manually with ease, and repeatedly without being broken, and can close the bag in a manner reliably tight to water, air or the like.

[0092] In the above embodiments, the cutting line 15, 220, 231 has an end at which the cutting notch is formed by previously cutting an edge of the bag in a triangular shape with a sharp angle. The cutting notch is used for initially tearing the edge of the bag, and facilitates the cutting along the cutting line. However a cutting line in the present invention may have no cutting notch. It is possible to use any one of forms of cutting lines, including a train of perforations for facilitating cutting, a partially thinned line formed by cutting the bag sheet half as deep as its thickness, a simply printed line only indicating a position suitably for cutting of the bag, and the like.

[0093] In Figs. 34-42, still other preferred embodiments are described, in which position setter structures are used to regulate the position of recording sheets. In Figs. 34 and 35, a recording sheet package 310 or cartridge is constituted of a packaging case 311 and ther-

mosensitive recording sheets 312.

[0094] Although a top plate 311a has a flat shape, there are position setter projections 325 and 326 formed to project over a bottom plate 311b, an end plate 311c, lateral plates 311d and 311e, and a push plate 311h and formed by embossing. The shape of the position setter projections 325 and 326 is elliptical or oval, and may be a form of any suitable loop. The position setter projections 325 and 326 have flat projection tops 325a and 326a, which push the recording sheets 312. Thus the recording sheets 312 are kept positioned inside the packaging case 311 without deviation. The recording sheets 312 are squeezed between the push plate 311h and the bottom plate 311b, and kept in contact with one another. Thus there is little external moisture coming to the recording surface of the recording sheets 312, which can be shielded from moisture with further effectiveness.

[0095] In the above embodiments, the position setter projections 325 and 326 are elliptical and have the projection tops 325a and 326a being flat. Furthermore, it is possible to form position setter projections in various shapes, for example, a frustum of a cone, a frustum of a pyramid and the like. Such position setter projections may have a shape of a circle, a quadrilateral, any polygon, a cross, a combination of a quadrilateral and a pair of two semicircles, and so forth.

[0096] Instead of using the position setter projections 325 and 326, a packaging case 386 can have a position setter 387 in Fig. 39. The position setter 387 is constituted by a cushioning material 385, which is attached to an inside of the packaging case 386. The cushioning material 385 exists in one position on one of the lateral plates of the packaging case 386. Of course it is possible to arrange a plurality of cushioning materials 385 on a bottom plate, an end plate and a push plate of the packaging case 386 in the same manner as the position setter projections 325 and 326 of Fig. 36. Furthermore, as illustrated in Fig. 40, a packaging case 389 can have a position setter 390 constituted by a bracket 388, which may be paper or plastic. Also a packaging case can have a position setter constituted by a projection (not shown) as a portion of the packaging case. To define such a portion, an inside portion of the packaging case 389 may be cut and bent up in an inward direction.

[0097] In Fig. 41, another preferred recording sheet package 393 or cartridge is illustrated. The recording sheet package 393 is constituted by a packaging case 391 and thermosensitive recording sheets 392. The packaging case 391 has a width smaller than that of the recording sheets 392, which are curved while contained in the packaging case 391. Lateral walls of the packaging case 391 forcibly keep the recording sheets 392 curved as illustrated in Fig. 42. Force of the recording sheets 392 to recover their flat shape positions the recording sheets 392 inside the packaging case 391, so that the recording sheets 392 do not have deviations inside the packaging case 391. In the course of manufac-

ture of the recording sheet package 393, the recording sheets 392, after being stacked, are curved and, for the their insertion into the packaging case 391, kept at a width slightly smaller than that of the packaging case 391, as illustrated in Fig. 41. Therefore, the recording sheets 392 can be inserted in the packaging case 391 with great ease.

[0098] In the present invention, the recording sheets to be packaged may be a sublimation type, a wax-transfer type or any of other various types.

[0099] In the above embodiments, the sheet supply cassette is used for the thermal printer. Also the sheet supply cassette in the present invention may be constructed for use with an instant camera for taking instant photographs, or a duplicator machine, a telefacsimile machine or any machine for producing hard copies in any form with recording sheets. In the above embodiments, the recording sheets are color thermosensitive recording material. Furthermore, recording material in the present invention may be widely used simple paper called PPC paper, monochromatic thermosensitive recording material, photosensitive recording material, or the like.

[0100] Although the present invention has been fully described by way of the preferred embodiments thereof with reference to the accompanying drawings, various changes and modifications will be apparent to those having skill in this field. Therefore, unless otherwise these changes and modifications depart from the scope of the present invention, they should be construed as included therein.

Claims

1. A recording sheet package for a printer (75), said printer including a printer component for image recording to a recording sheet (12), a loading opening (77) through which said printer component is supplied with said recording sheet, and at least one guiding member (50-54) for positioning said recording sheet in said loading opening, said recording sheet package comprising:

a packaging case (11) for containing a stack of plural recording sheets with looseness, said loading opening being loadable with said packaging case;

a package outlet (20), formed in said packaging case, passable to one of said recording sheets, and set directed toward said printer component;

at least one cutout (23-27), formed in a periphery of said packaging case, for receiving said guiding member; and

at least one blocking mechanism (13c-13e, 85-87, 90), disposed inside said packaging case, for closing said cutout, said blocking

mechanism being shiftable inwards from said cutout by said guiding member.

2. A recording sheet package as defined in claim 1, wherein said blocking mechanism (13c-13e, 85-87) has a channel shape as viewed in section, and includes first, second and third portions arranged serially in connection with one another, said first and third portions are opposed to one another, a portion of said recording sheets (12) is located between said first and third portions, and a space is defined between said second portion and said recording sheets.

3. A recording sheet package as defined in claim 2, further comprising:

an attaching plate attached to an inner face of said packaging case (11); and
a deformable portion, disposed to extend from said attaching plate toward said cutout (23-27), for keeping said blocking mechanism (13c-13e, 85-87) positioned at said cutout, said deformable portion being resiliently deformed when said blocking mechanism is pushed through said cutout, and allowing said blocking mechanism to shift into said packaging case.

4. A recording sheet package as defined in claim 3, wherein said at least one cutout (23-27) is plural cutouts, and said at least one blocking mechanism (13c-13e, 85-87) is plural blocking members.

5. A recording sheet package as defined in claim 1, wherein said blocking mechanism (90) comprises an auxiliary bag (90), light-tight and moisture-proof, contained in said packaging case (11), for containing said stack of said recording sheets (12) with looseness.

6. A recording sheet package as defined in claim 1, wherein said printer (75) further includes:

a supply roller (21) for supplying said printer component with said recording sheet (12) through said loading opening (77);

a sheet supply cassette, mounted in said loading opening, having said guiding member (50-54) internally, and loaded with said packaging case (11) and said recording sheets;

a cassette outlet (60), formed in said sheet supply cassette, set directed toward said printer component, and passable to one of said recording sheets;

an insertion opening (65), formed in said sheet supply cassette, for receiving insertion of said supply roller, for allowing contact of said supply roller with one of said recording sheets; and

- a bias mechanism (59) for pressing said recording sheets against said supply roller by biasing said recording sheets.
7. A recording sheet package as defined in claim 1, further comprising:
- an outer bag (14) for enclosing said packaging case (11) with said recording sheets (12) with said package outlet (20) directed substantially upwards; and
- a suspension portion (17), disposed on a top edge of said outer bag, for suspension of said outer bag.
8. A recording sheet package comprising:
- an auxiliary bag (90), light-tight and moisture-proof, having an outlet, for containing a stack of plural recording sheets (12) with looseness after insertion through said outlet;
- a packaging case (11) for containing said auxiliary bag and said recording sheets;
- a package outlet (20) which is formed in said packaging case, at which said outlet is set, and which is passable to one of said recording sheets; and
- at least one cutout (23-27) formed in a periphery of said packaging case, said auxiliary bag being uncovered in said cutout.
9. A sheet supply cassette for a printer (75), said printer including a printer component for image recording to a recording sheet (12, 312, 392), a loading opening (77) through which said recording sheet is inserted into said printer component, and a supply roller (21) for supplying said printer component with said recording sheet, said sheet supply cassette comprising:
- a cassette body (41, 42, 143, 144), loaded in said loading opening, for containing a stack of plural recording sheets with looseness;
- a cassette outlet (60), formed in said cassette body, passable to one of said recording sheets, and set directed toward said printer component;
- an insertion opening (65, 115), formed in said cassette body, for receiving insertion of said supply roller, for allowing contact of said supply roller with one of said recording sheets; and
- a bias mechanism (59) for pressing said recording sheets against said supply roller by biasing said recording sheets.
10. A sheet supply cassette as defined in claim 9, wherein said cassette body (41, 42, 143, 144) includes:

a cassette portion, having at least one open face, for containing said recording sheets (12, 312, 392); and

a lid for closing said cassette portion in an openable manner.

11. A sheet supply cassette as defined in claim 9, further comprising a sheet separator, disposed in said cassette outlet (60), for separating an uppermost one of said recording sheets (12, 312, 392) from remainder thereof by preventing a second uppermost one of said recording sheets from passing said cassette outlet with said uppermost one.

12. A sheet supply cassette as defined in claim 11, wherein said cassette outlet (60) is defined between said cassette portion and said lid, said sheet separator is disposed on said cassette portion inside said cassette outlet;

further comprising a light-shielding member, disposed on said lid inside said cassette outlet, for preventing ambient light from entry into said cassette body (41, 42, 143, 144) through said cassette outlet;

wherein said cassette outlet is closed by contact of said light-shielding member with said cassette portion inside said cassette outlet.

13. A sheet supply cassette as defined in claim 12, wherein said light-shielding member is a resilient plate having a shape bent with corrugation.

14. A sheet supply cassette as defined in claim 9, wherein said cassette body (41, 42, 143, 144) is loaded with a recording sheet package, and said recording sheet package includes:

a packaging case (11, 110, 311, 391) for containing said stack of said recording sheets (12, 312, 392);

a package outlet (20), formed in said packaging case, passable to one of said recording sheets, and positioned at said cassette outlet (60);

wherein said packaging case has a bottom plate, one edge of said bottom plate is located at said package outlet, movable upwards, and pushed by said bias mechanism (59).

15. A sheet supply cassette as defined in claim 14, wherein said packaging case (11, 110, 311, 391) has a substantially parallelepipedic shape, has five wall plates including a bottom plate, a top plate, an end plate, and first and second lateral plates, and said recording sheets (12, 312, 392) are laid between said bottom plate and said top plate serially on one another;

said packaging case has a size greater than said recording sheets and contains said recording sheets with looseness;
said packaging case further includes at least one cutout (23-27), positioned in a periphery thereof, and formed in said bottom plate and/or said top plate;

further comprising at least one guiding member (50-54), disposed inside said cassette body (41, 42, 143, 144), inserted in said cutout of said packaging case loaded in said cassette body, for positioning said recording sheets.

16. A sheet supply cassette comprising:

a cassette body (140, 141, 146, 147) for containing a stack of plural recording sheets (12);
a cassette outlet (60), formed in said cassette body, and passable to one of said recording sheets;
a supply roller (142, 148), disposed in said cassette body, for rotating to convey one of said recording sheet through said cassette outlet; and
a bias mechanism (59) for pressing said recording sheets against said supply roller by biasing said recording sheets.

17. A sheet supply cassette as defined in claim 16, wherein said cassette body (140, 141, 146, 147) includes:

a cassette portion, having at least one open face, for containing said recording sheets (12); and
a lid for closing said cassette portion in an openable manner.

18. A sheet supply cassette as defined in claim 16, wherein said cassette body (140, 141, 146, 147) is loaded with a recording sheet package, and said recording sheet package includes:

a packaging case (110) for containing said stack of said recording sheets (12);
a package outlet (20), formed in said packaging case, passable to one of said recording sheets, and positioned at said cassette outlet (60);

wherein said packaging case has a bottom plate, one edge of said bottom plate is located at said package outlet, movable upwards, and pushed by said bias mechanism (59).

19. A recording sheet package comprising:

a packaging case (11, 311) for containing a

stack of plural recording sheets (12, 312);
a package outlet (20), formed in said packaging case, and passable to one of said recording sheets; and
a position setter (13c-13e, 85-87, 90, 325, 326, 387, 390), disposed between an inside of said packaging case and said recording sheets, for preventing said recording sheets from being loose inside said packaging case.

20. A recording sheet package as defined in claim 19, said recording sheet package being used in a printer (75), said printer including a printer component for image recording to said recording sheets (12, 312), and a loading opening (77) through which said printer component is supplied with said recording sheets;

wherein said packaging case (11, 311) is loaded in said loading opening, and said package outlet (20) is set directed toward said printer component.

21. A recording sheet package as defined in claim 19, wherein said packaging case (11, 311) has a substantially parallelepipedic shape, has five wall plates including a bottom plate, a top plate, an end plate, and first and second lateral plates, said recording sheets (12, 312) are laid between said bottom plate and said top plate serially on one another, and said end plate is located opposite to said package outlet (20);

wherein said position setter (13c-13e, 85-87, 325, 387, 390) comprises at least one projection disposed to project from at least one of said end plate and said first and second lateral plates.

22. A recording sheet package as defined in claim 19, wherein said packaging case (11, 311) includes:

a bottom plate and a top plate, between which said recording sheets (12, 312) are laid serially on one another, one edge of said bottom plate being located at said package outlet (20), and movable upwards;
a push plate, disposed between said top plate and said recording sheets, connected with said top plate at said package outlet, for pressing said recording sheets;

wherein said position setter (13c-13e, 85-87, 326) comprises at least one projection disposed to project from at least one of said push plate and said bottom plate.

23. A recording sheet package as defined in claim 19, wherein said position setter (325, 326) comprises at least one projection formed by embossing.

24. A recording sheet package as defined in claim 19,

said recording sheet package being used in a printer (75), said printer including a printer component for image recording to said recording sheets (12), a loading opening (77) through which said printer component is supplied with said recording sheets, and at least one guiding member (50-54) for positioning said recording sheets in said loading opening;

said recording sheet package further comprising at least one cutout (23-27), formed in a periphery of said packaging case (11), for receiving said guiding member;

wherein said position setter (13c-13e, 85-87, 90) closes said cutout, and is shiftable inwards from said cutout by said guiding member.

25. A recording sheet package as defined in claim 19, wherein said position setter (90) comprises an auxiliary bag (90), light-tight and moisture-proof, contained in said packaging case (11), for containing said stack of said recording sheets (12) with looseness;

further comprising at least one cutout (23-27) formed in a periphery of said packaging case, said auxiliary bag being uncovered in said cutout.

26. A recording sheet package comprising:

a packaging case (391), having a substantially parallelepipedic shape, for containing a stack of plural recording sheets (392);
a package outlet (20), formed in said packaging case, and passable to one of said recording sheets; and

wherein an inside of said packaging case has a first width, said recording sheets have a second width, said first width is smaller than said second width, and said packaging case keeps said recording sheets curved, for preventing said recording sheets from being loose therein.

27. A recording sheet package comprising:

a packaging case (11, 110, 211, 250, 311, 391) for containing a stack of plural recording sheets (12, 212, 312, 392);

a package outlet (20, 214), formed in said packaging case, and passable to one of said recording sheets;

an outer bag (14, 213, 230, 241) for enclosing said packaging case with said recording sheets with said package outlet directed substantially upwards; and

a suspension portion (17, 223), disposed on a top edge of said outer bag, for suspension of said outer bag.

28. A recording sheet package as defined in claim 27, wherein said outer bag (14, 213) is cuttable along one of two vertical edges thereof to be opened.

29. A recording sheet package as defined in claim 28, further comprising a fastener (16, 222), disposed on said outer bag (14, 213) to extend along said one vertical edge, for closing said outer bag in an openable manner, said outer bag being cuttable along a cutting line extended between said one vertical edge and said fastener.

30. A recording sheet package as defined in claim 27, further comprising direction information, indicated on an outer face of said outer bag (213, 230, 241), for representing a position of said package outlet (214) relative to said outer bag.

31. A recording sheet package as defined in claim 27, wherein said recording sheets (12, 212, 312, 392) are contained in said packaging case (11, 110, 211, 250, 311, 391) as stacked with a recording surface thereof oriented in one first direction;

further comprising a protective sheet, disposed in said first direction on said recording sheets in contact therewith, for protecting said recording surface.

32. A recording sheet package as defined in claim 27, wherein said outer bag (14, 213, 230, 241) includes light-shielding material.

33. A recording sheet package comprising:

a packaging case (110, 211, 250) for containing a stack of plural recording sheets (212);

a package outlet (214), formed in said packaging case, and passable to one of said recording sheets;

an outer bag (235) for enclosing said packaging case with said recording sheets with said package outlet directed substantially horizontally; and

a suspension portion (236), disposed close to a top edge of said outer bag, for suspension of said outer bag.

34. A recording sheet package as defined in claim 33, wherein said outer bag (235) is cuttable along said top edge to be opened.

35. A recording sheet package as defined in claim 34, wherein said suspension portion (236) comprises a suspension hole, formed in said outer bag (235) close to said top edge, for receiving insertion of a suspension member for suspension of said outer bag;

further comprising a fastener (238), disposed

on said outer bag to extend along said top edge, for closing said outer bag in an openable manner, said outer bag being cuttable along a cutting line extended between said top edge and said fastener.

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36. A recording sheet package as defined in claim 33, wherein said recording sheets (212) are contained in said packaging case (110, 211, 250) as stacked with a recording surface thereof oriented in one first direction;

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further comprising a protective sheet, disposed in said first direction on said recording sheets in contact therewith, for protecting said recording surface.

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37. A recording sheet package comprising:

a packaging case (110, 211, 250) for containing a stack of plural recording sheets (212);

a package outlet (214), formed in said packaging case, and passable to one of said recording sheets;

20

an outer bag (241), light-tight and moisture-proof, for containing said packaging case and said recording sheets;

25

a protection bag (243), folded and contained in said outer bag with said packaging case, for containing said packaging case and said recording sheets after said outer bag is opened, to protect said recording sheets; and

30

a fastener (244), disposed to an open portion of said protection bag, for closing said protection bag in an openable manner.

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FIG. 2

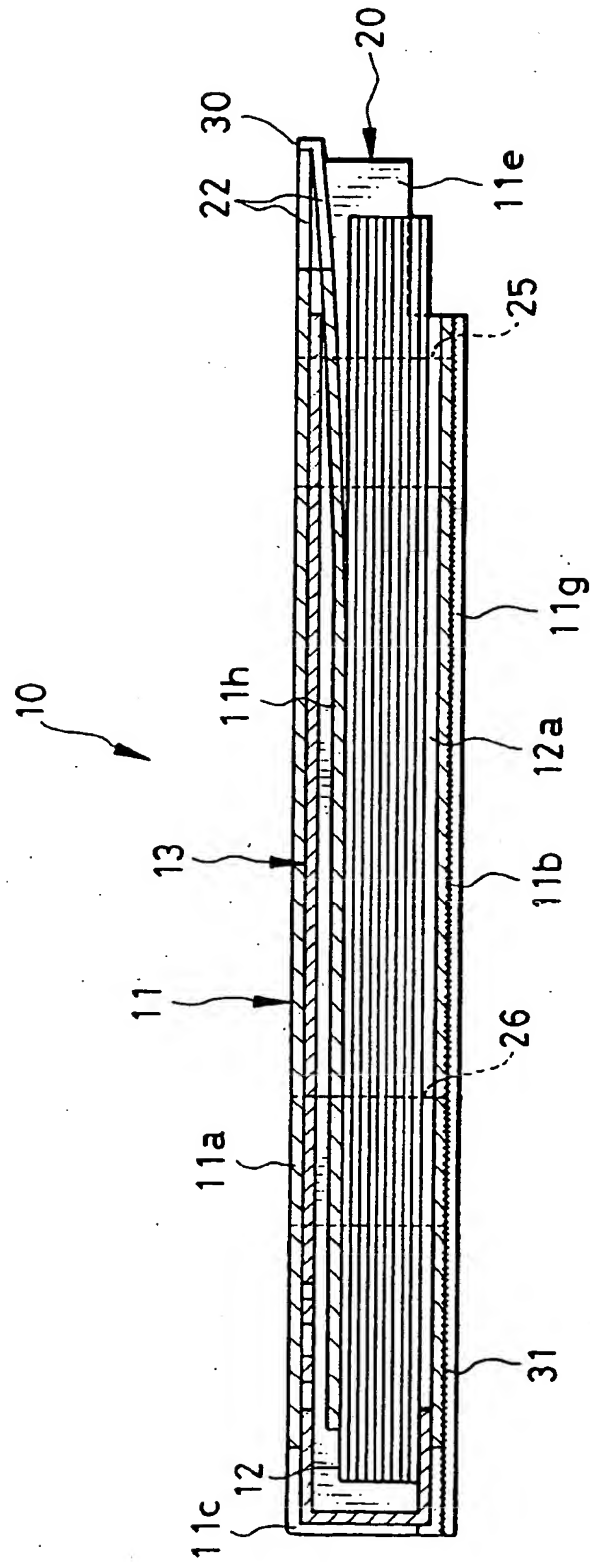


FIG. 3

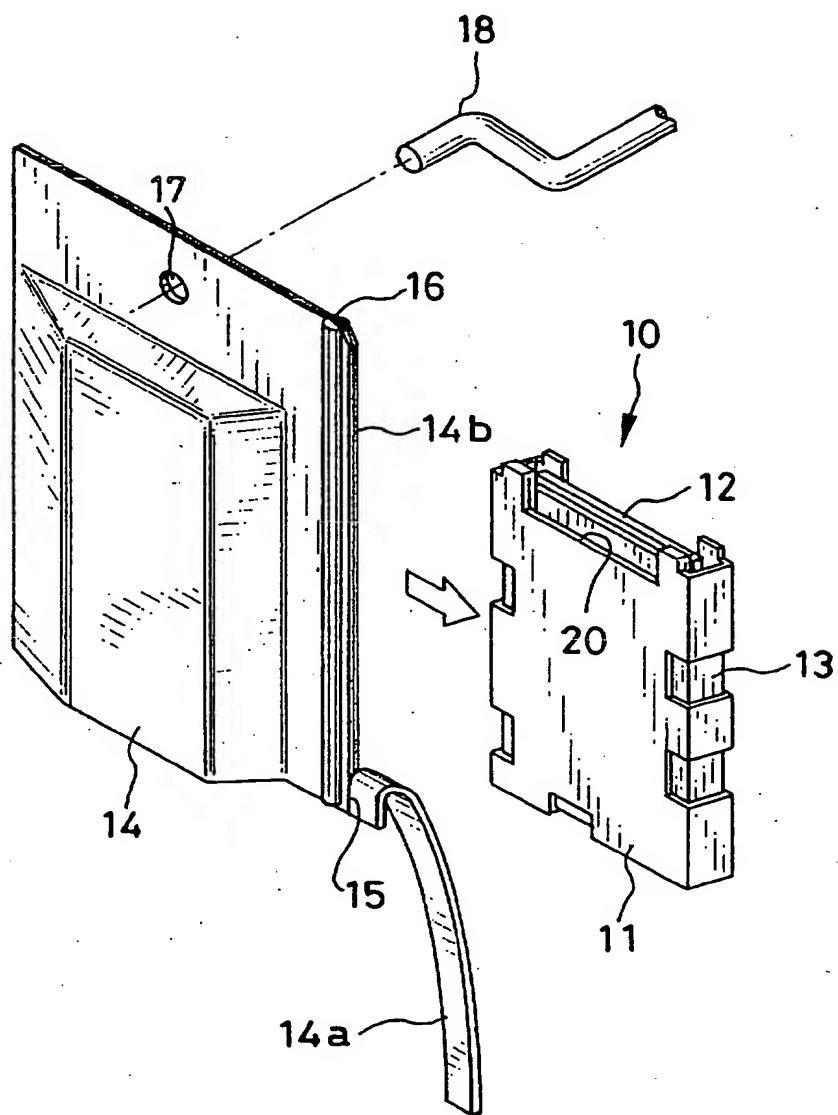


FIG. 4

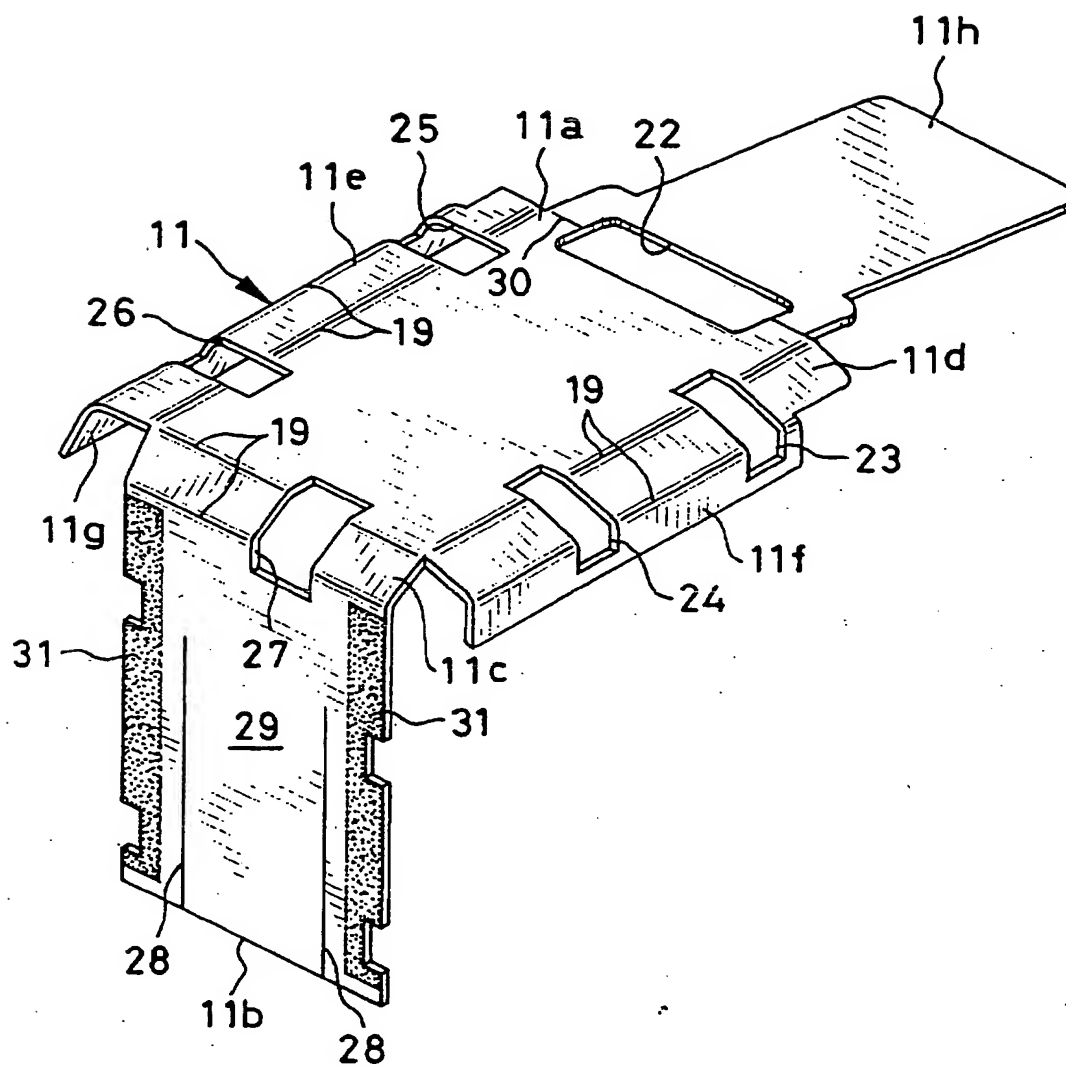


FIG. 5

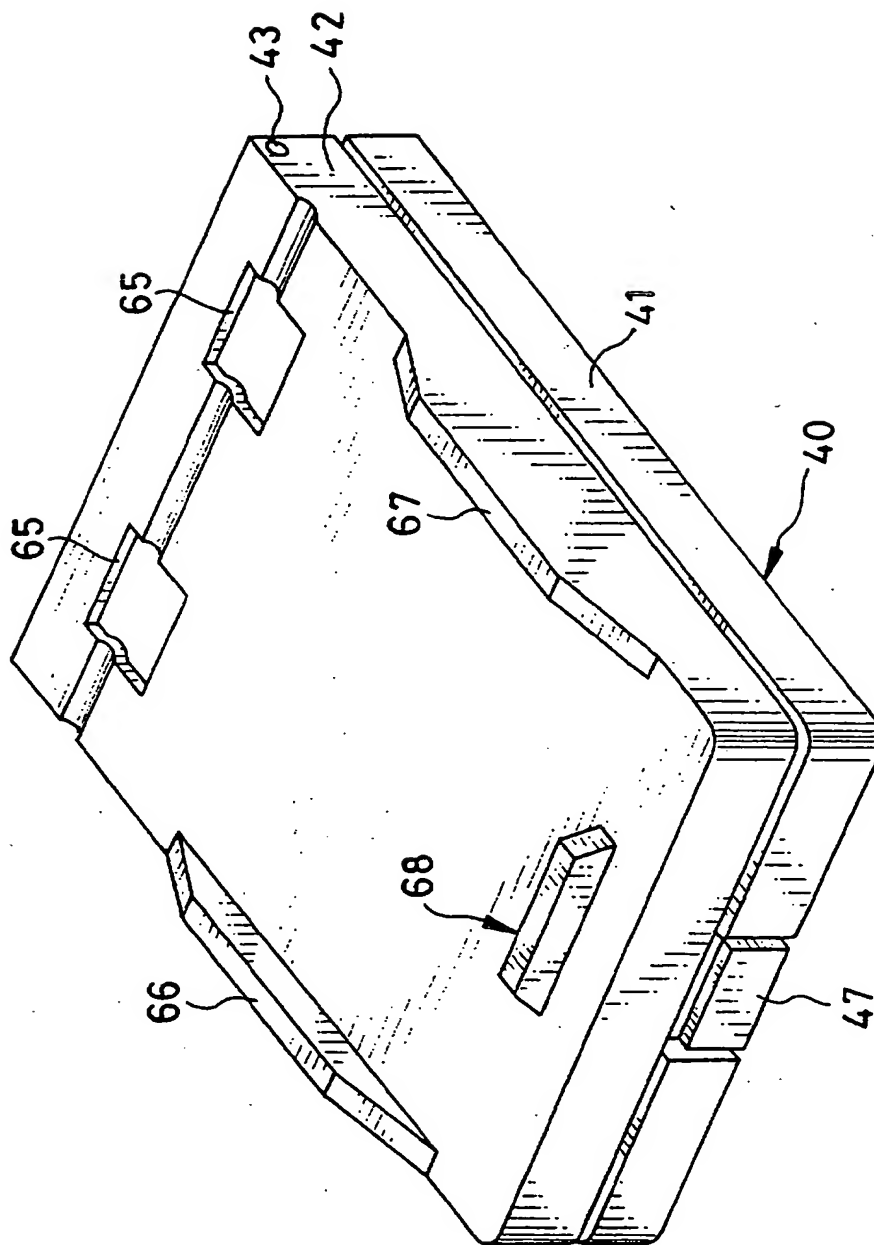


FIG. 6

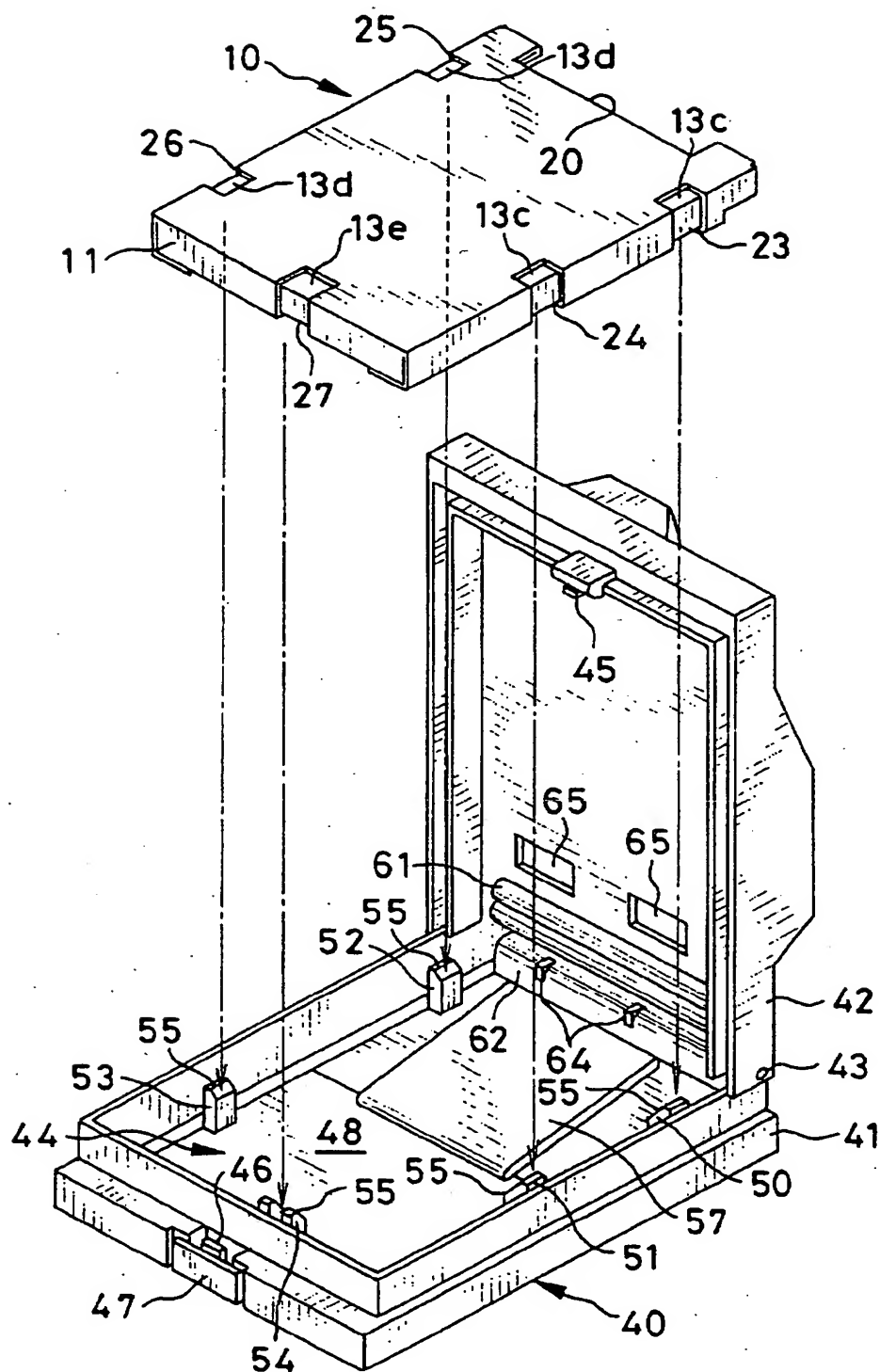


FIG. 7

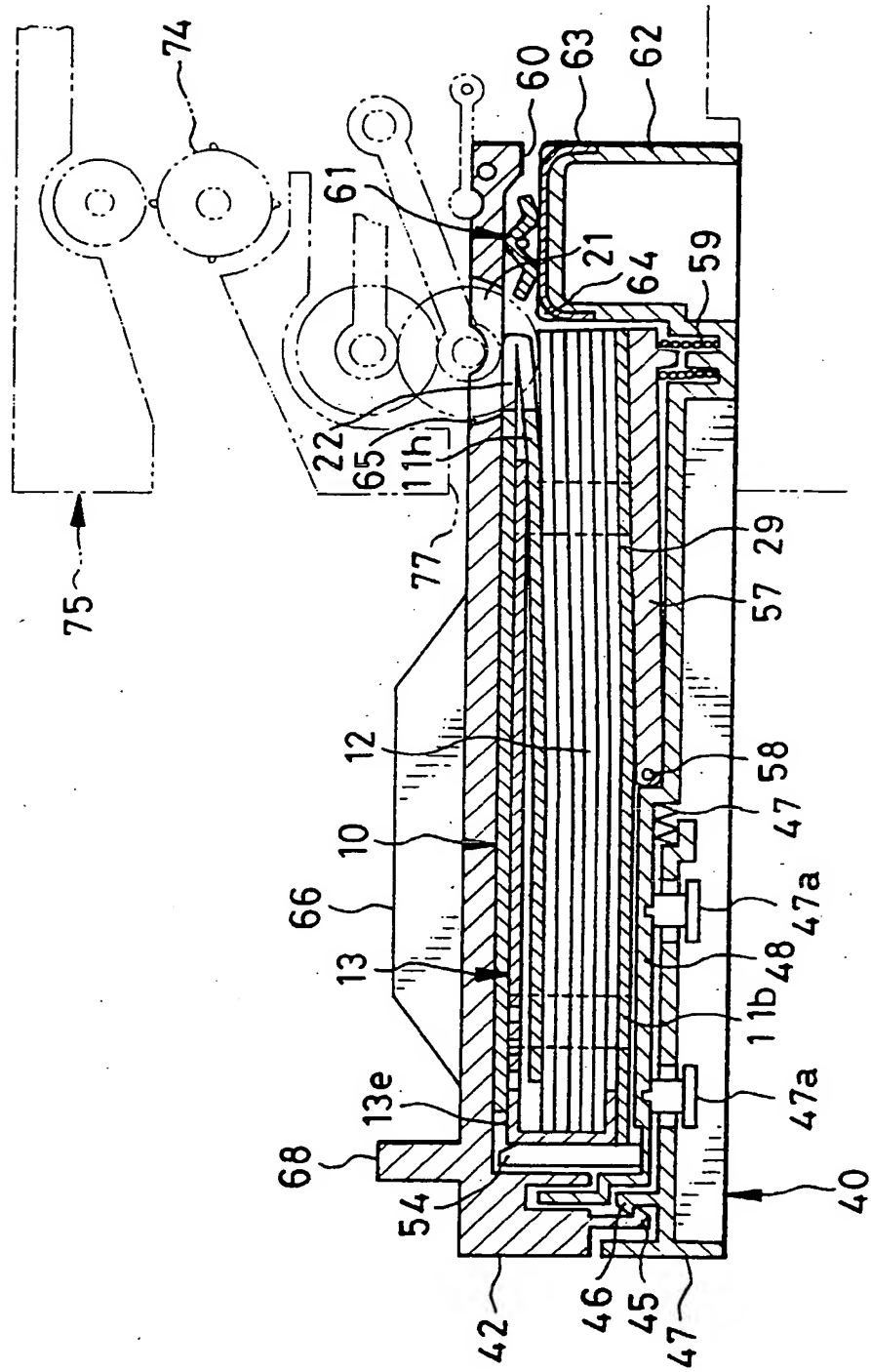


FIG. 8

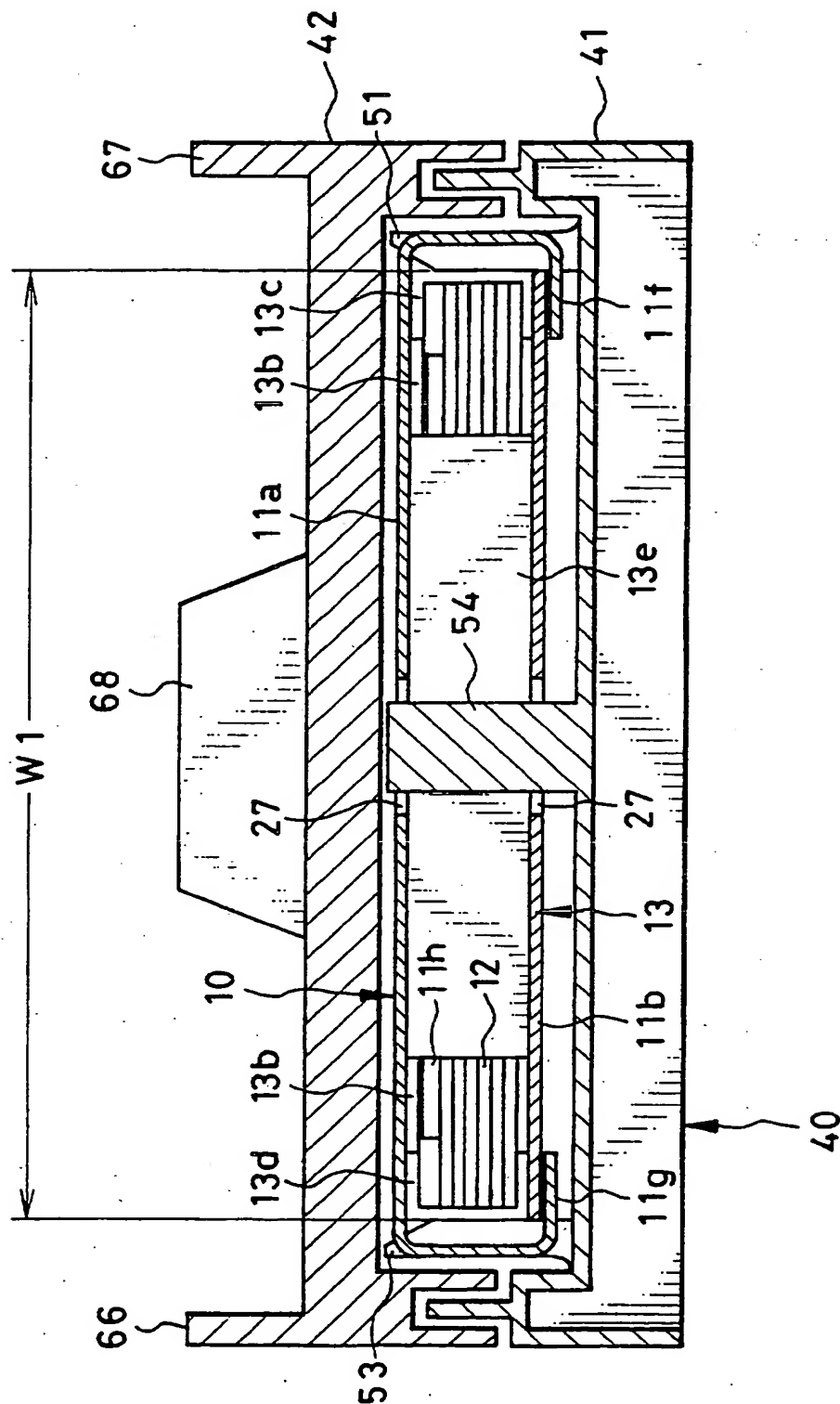


FIG. 9

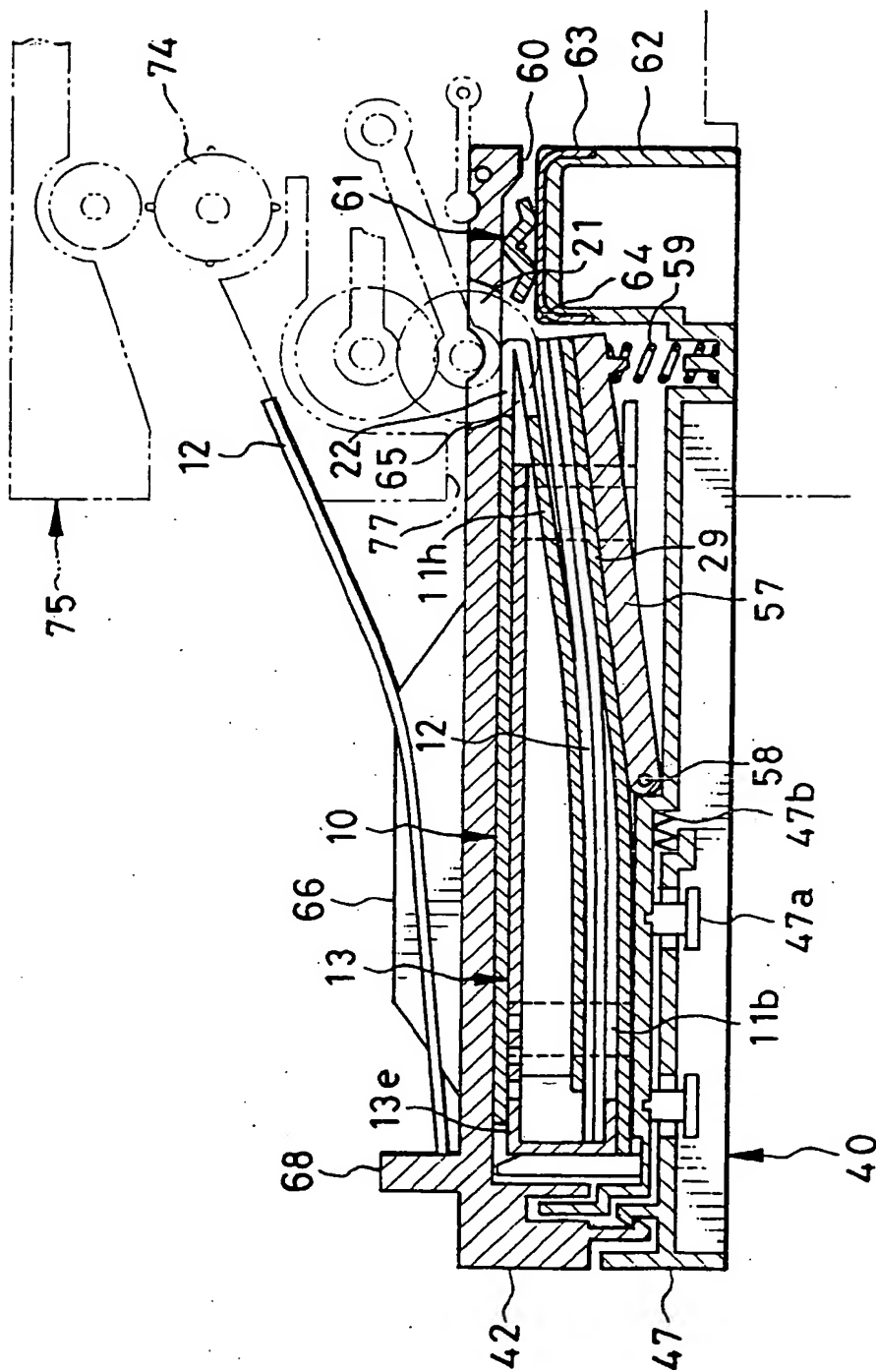


FIG. 10

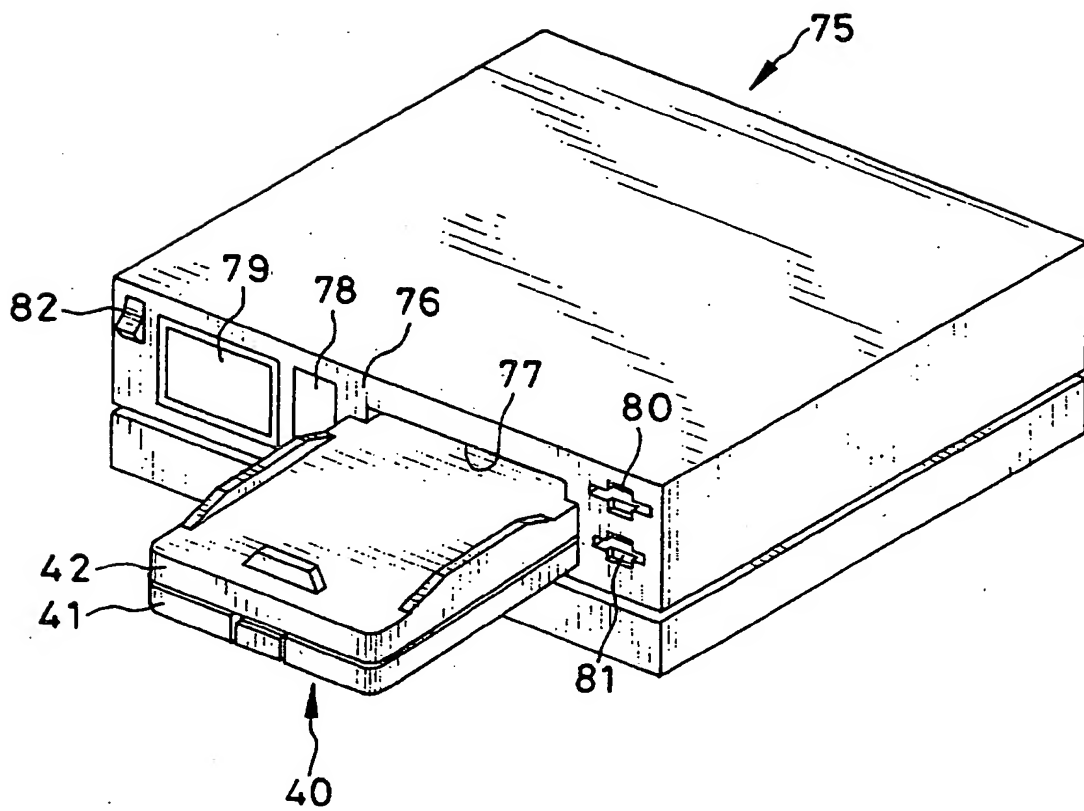


FIG. 11

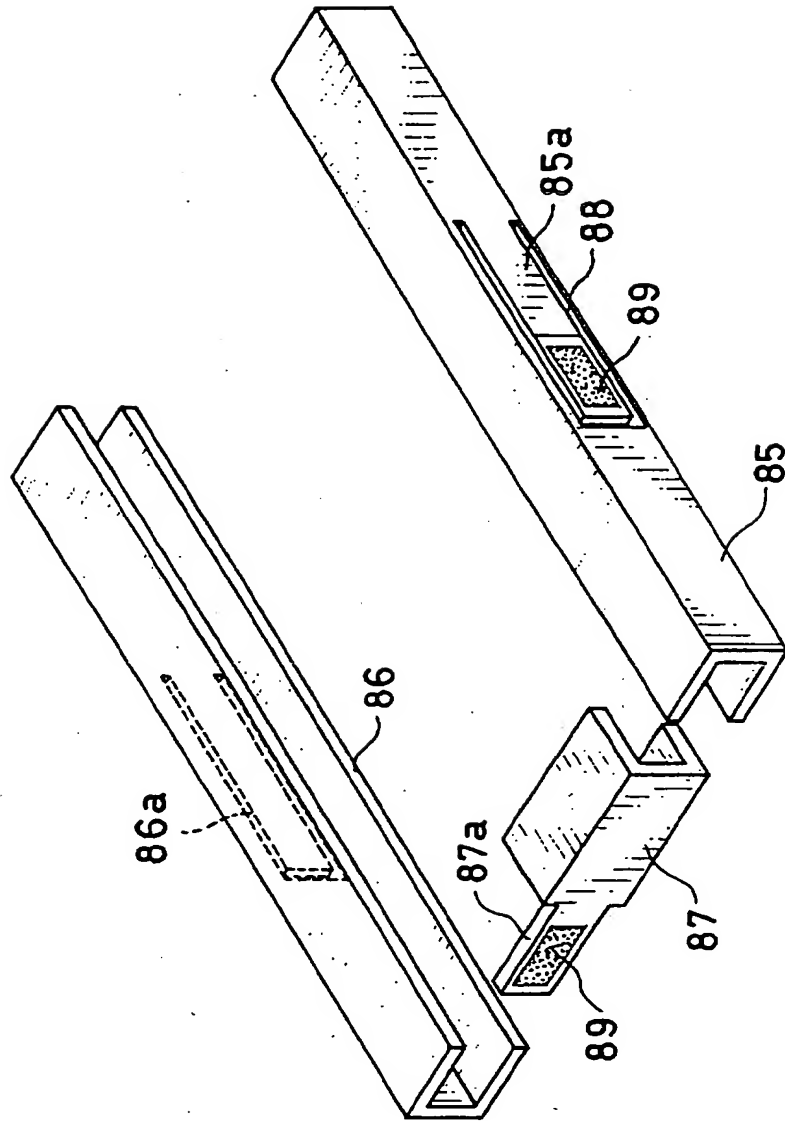


FIG. 12

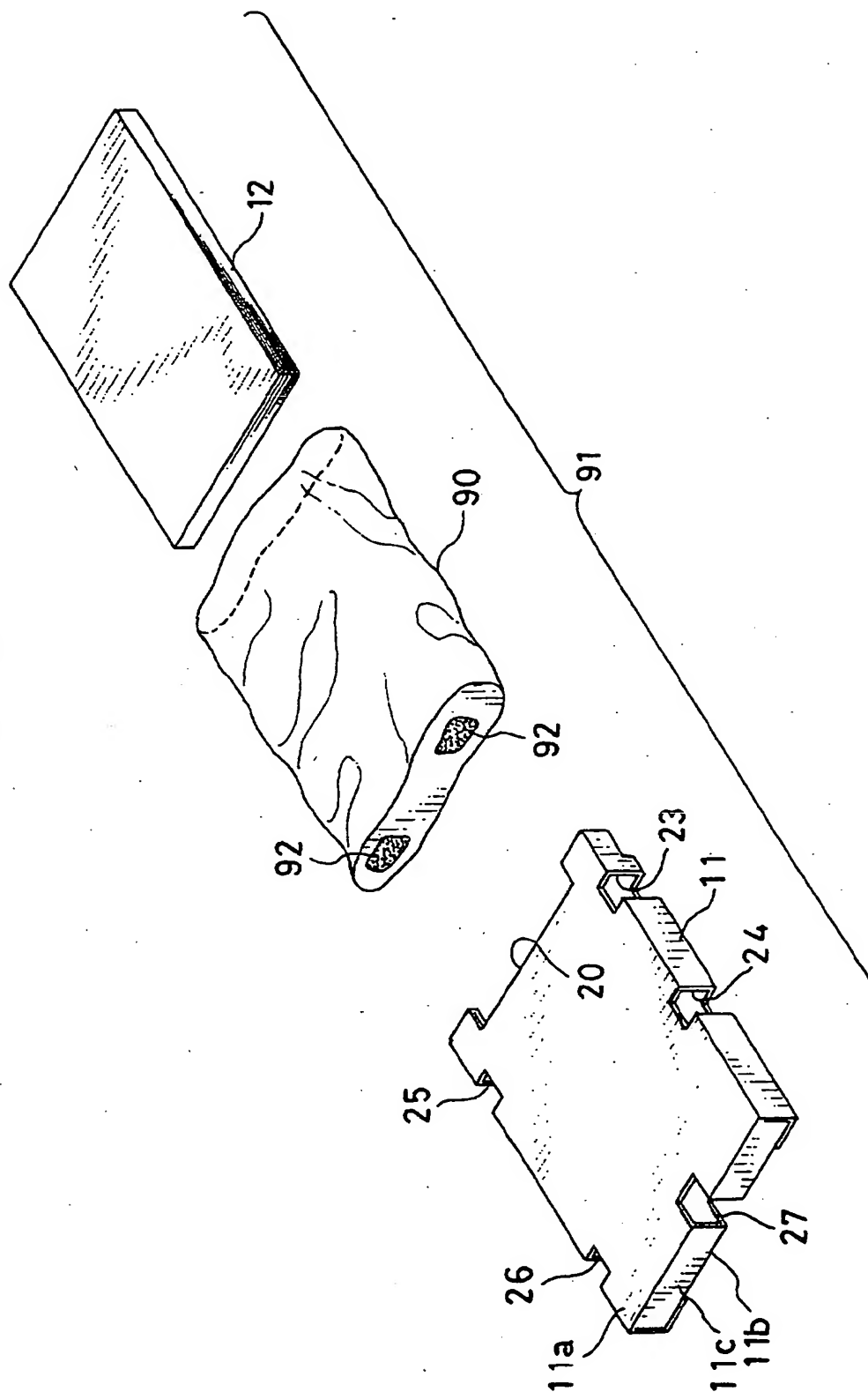


FIG. 13

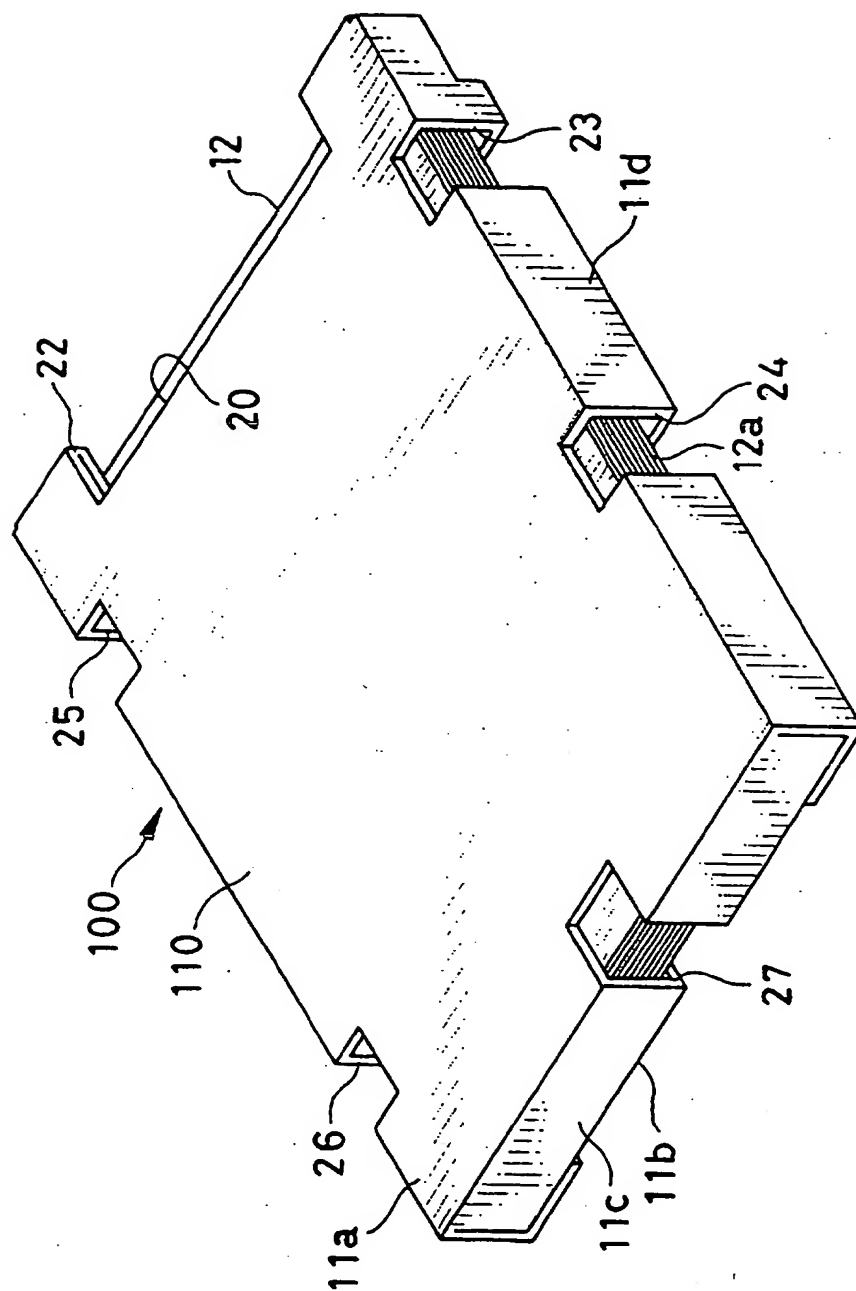


FIG. 14

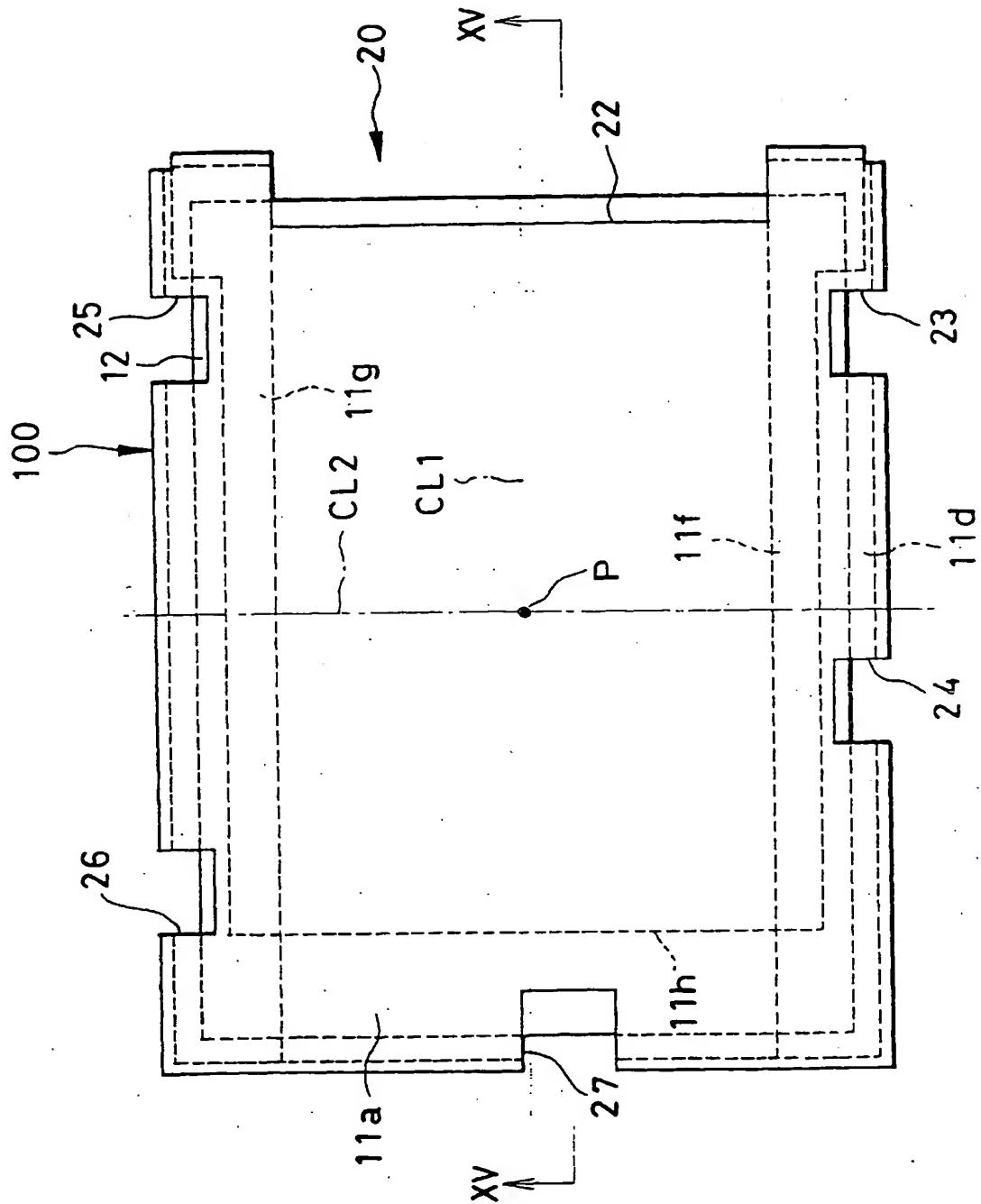


FIG. 15

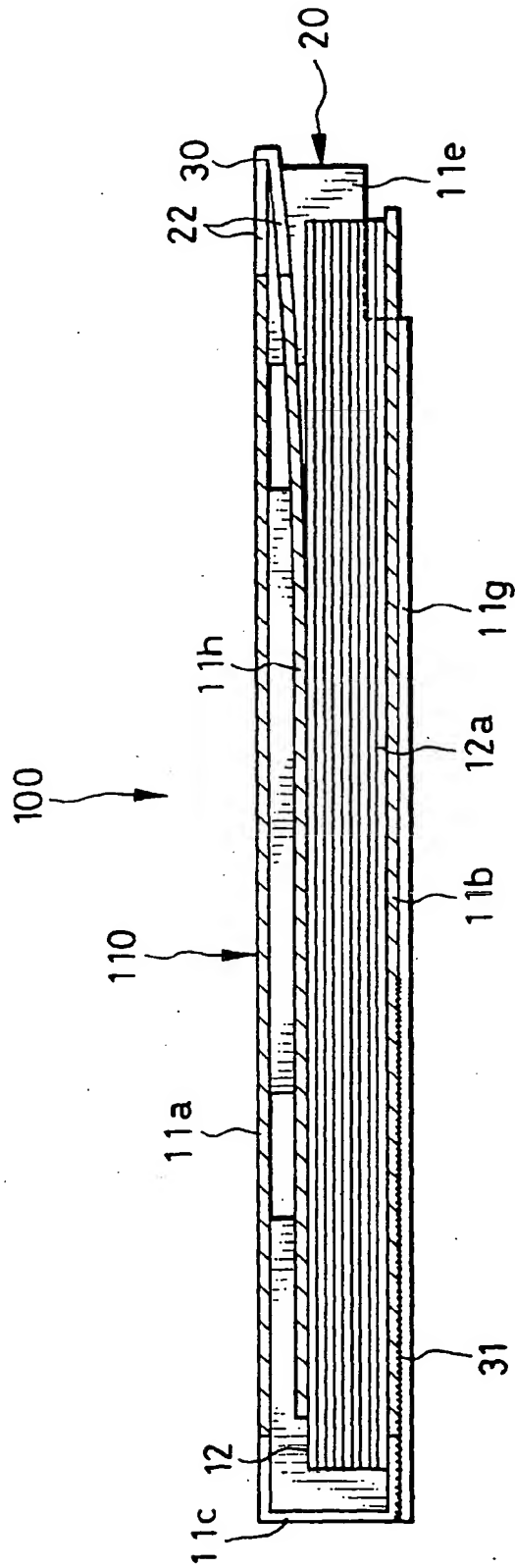


FIG. 16

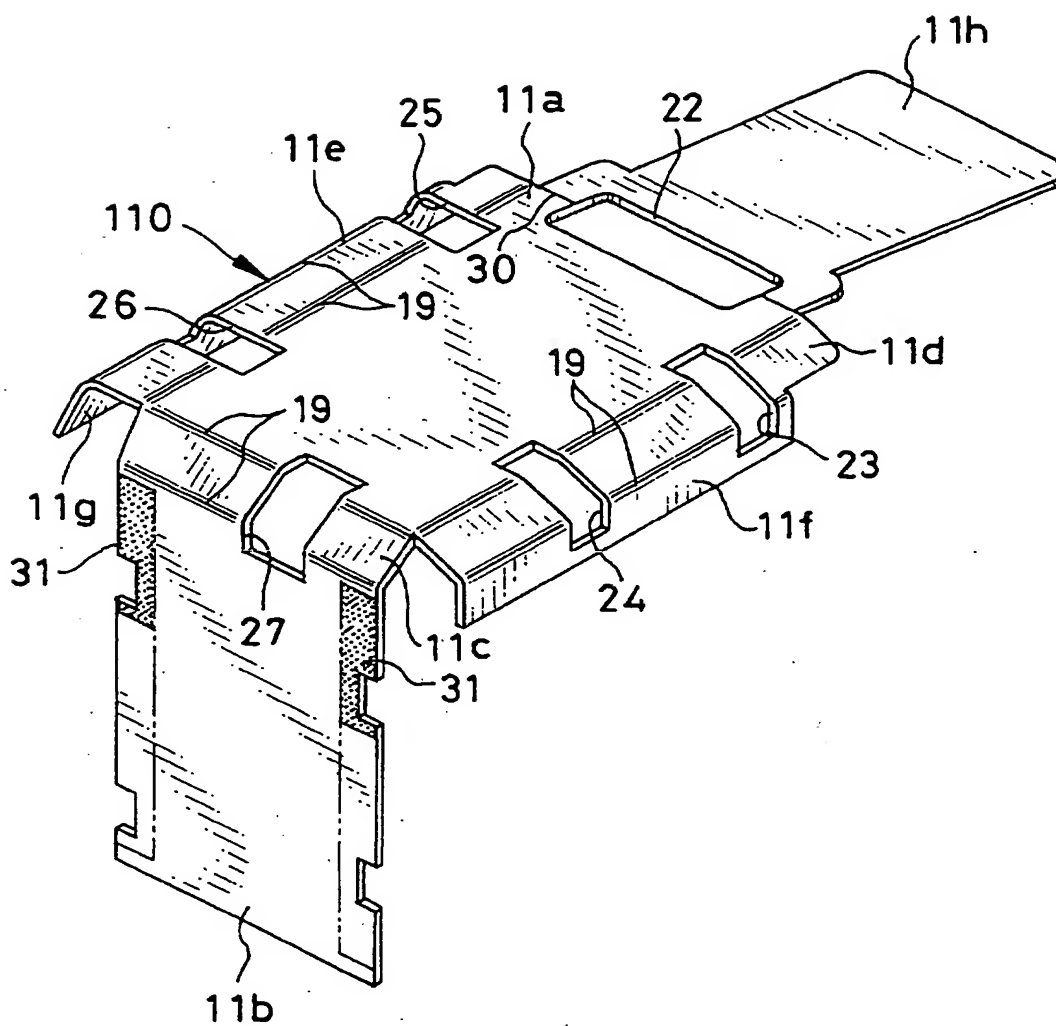


FIG. 17

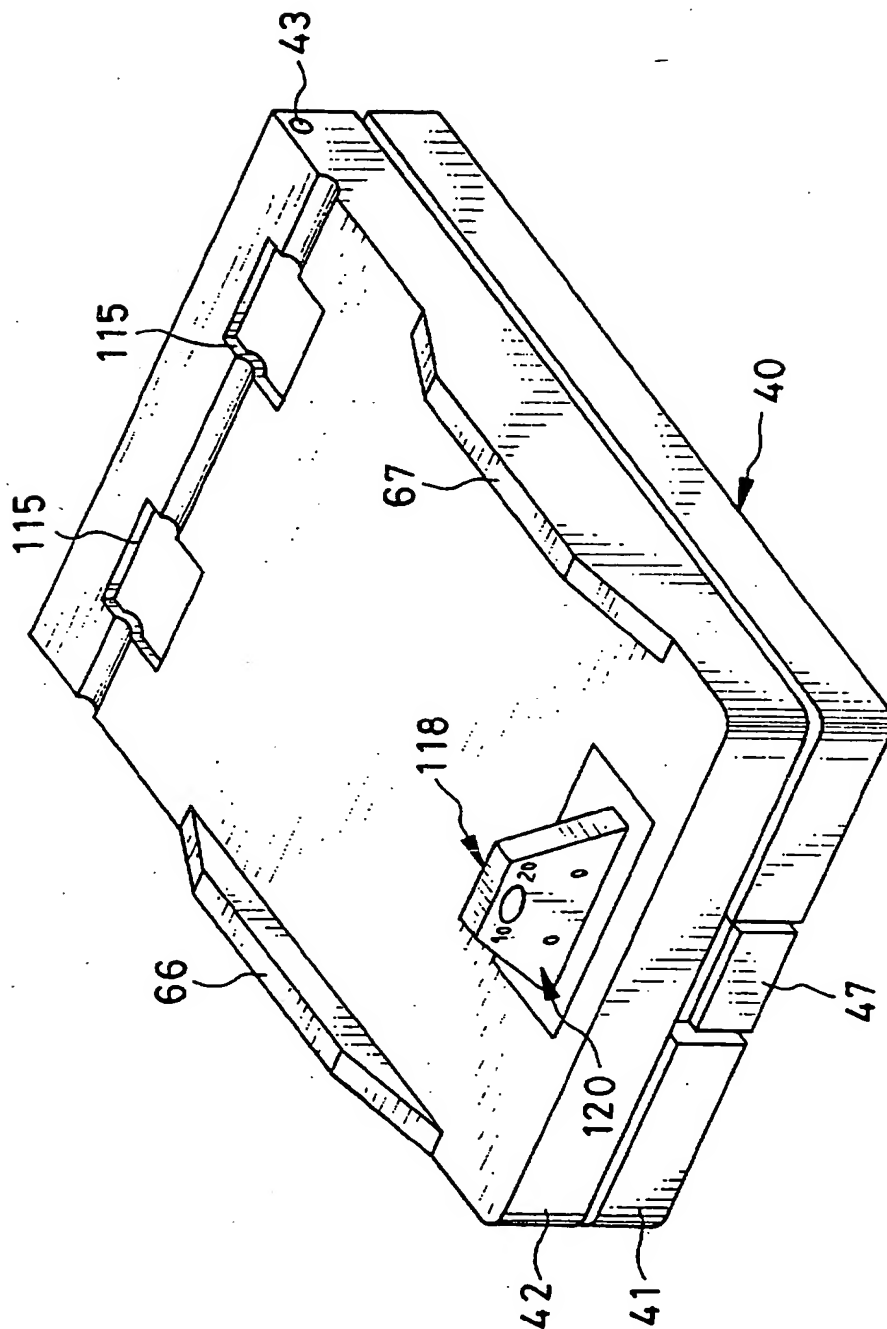


FIG. 18

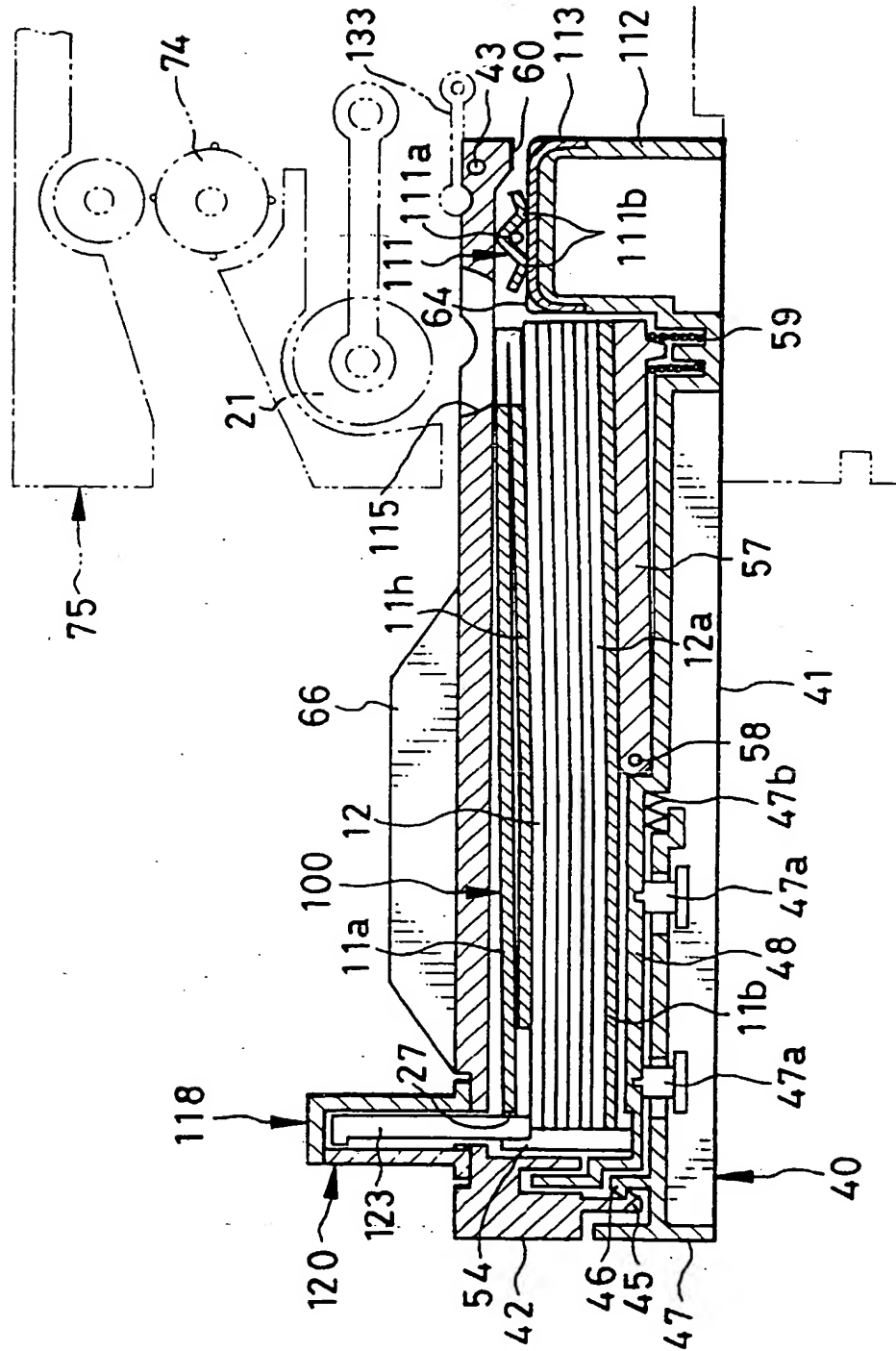


FIG. 19

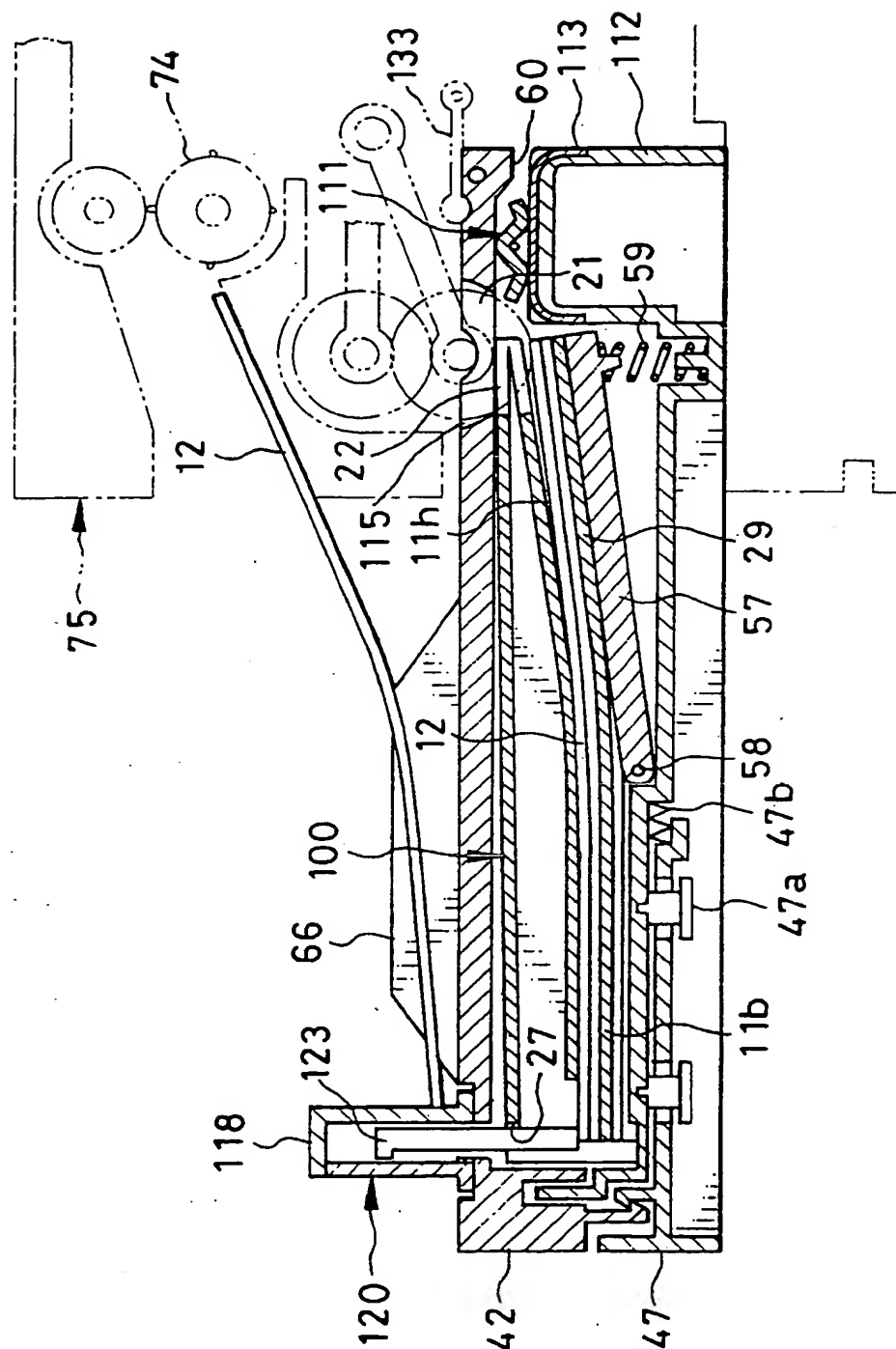


FIG. 20

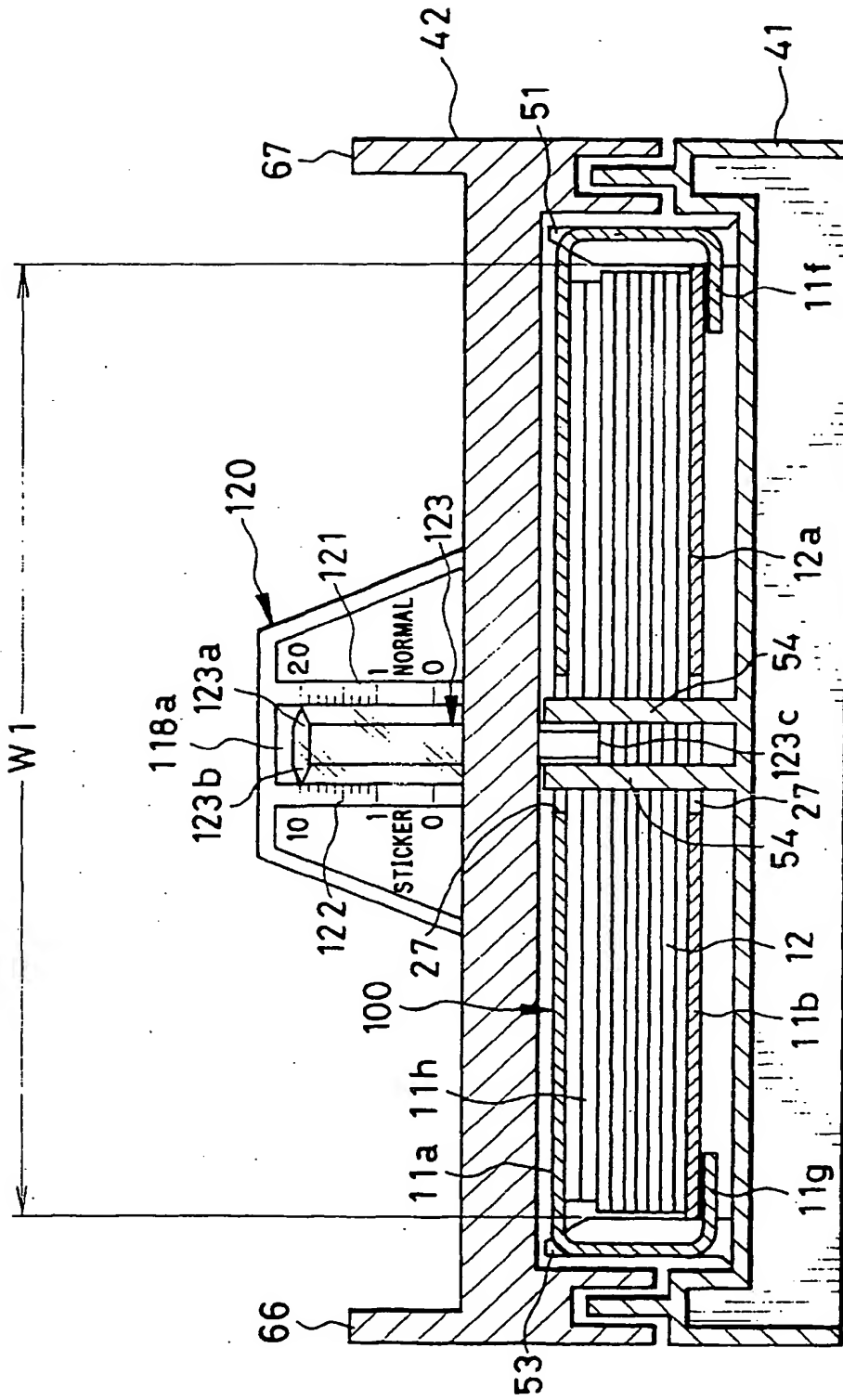


FIG. 21

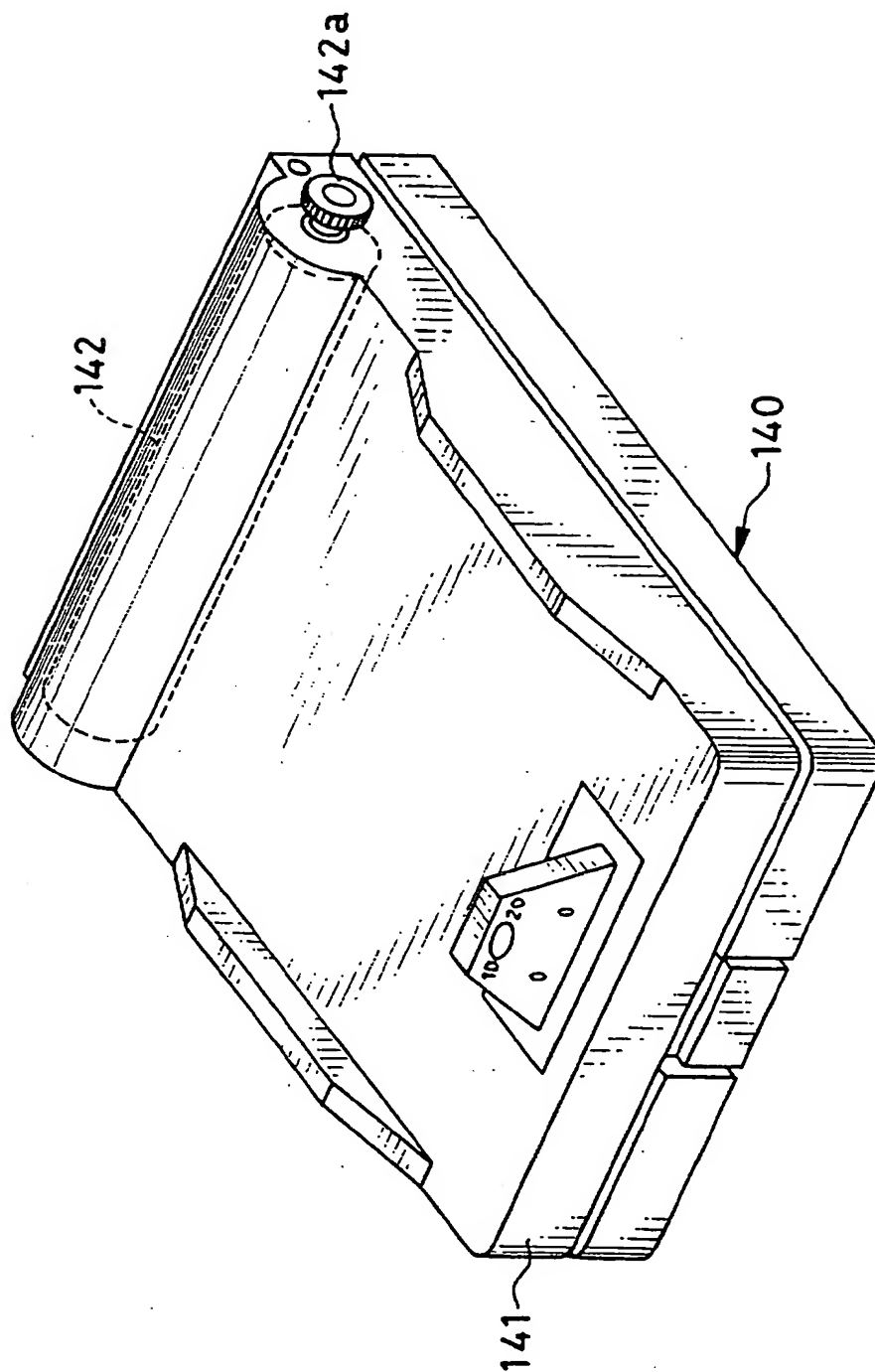


FIG. 22

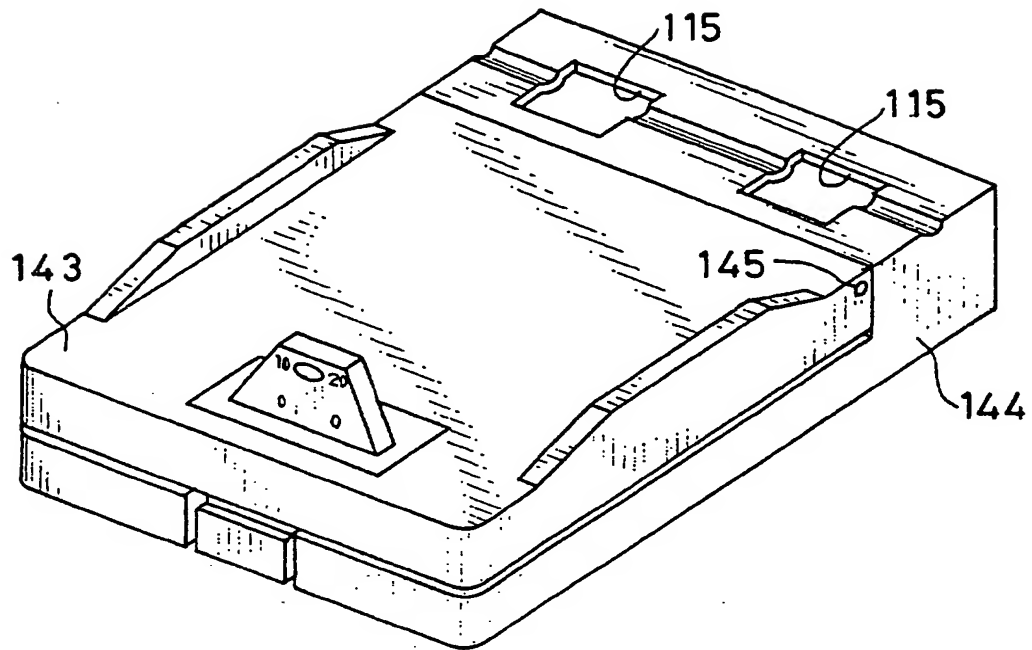


FIG. 23

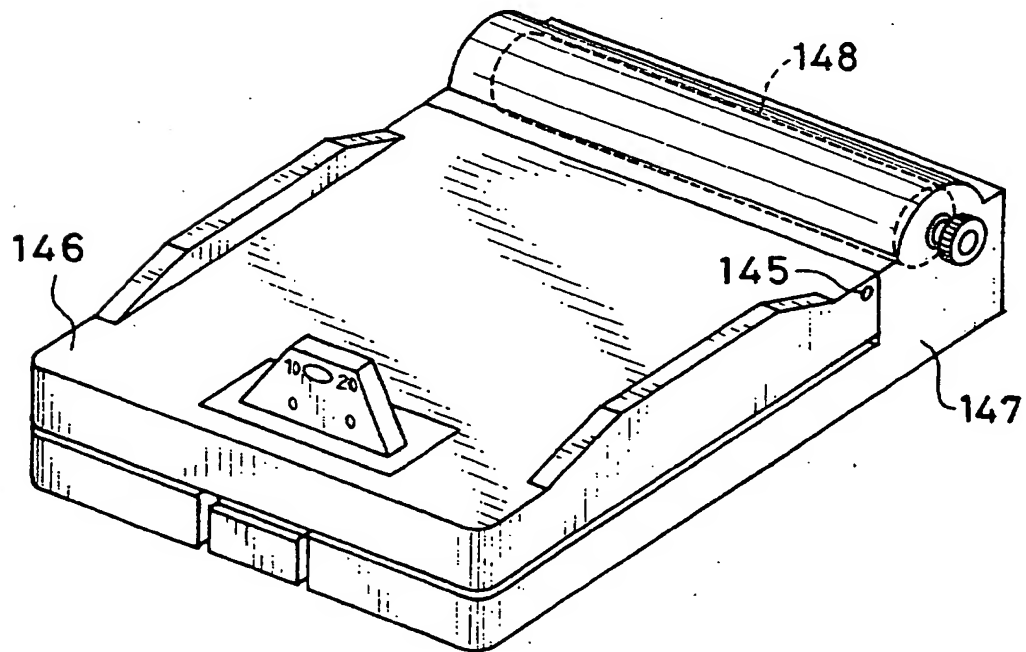


FIG. 24

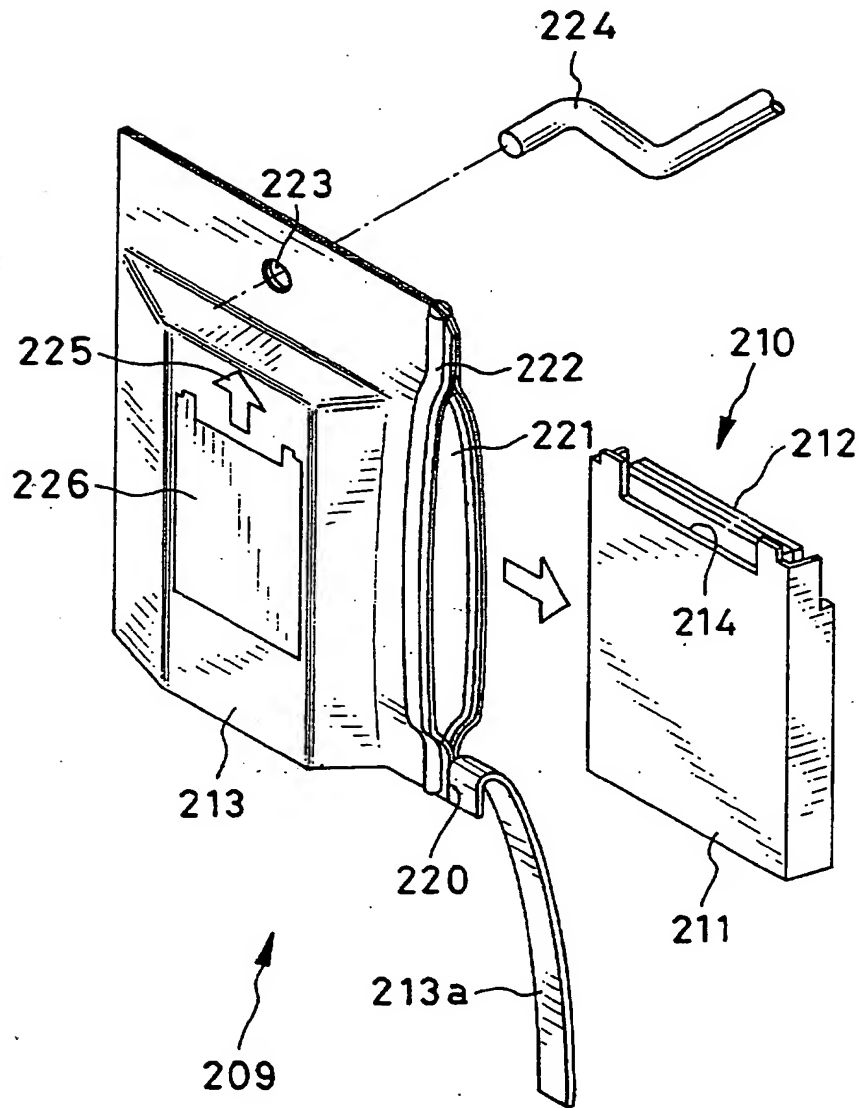


FIG. 25

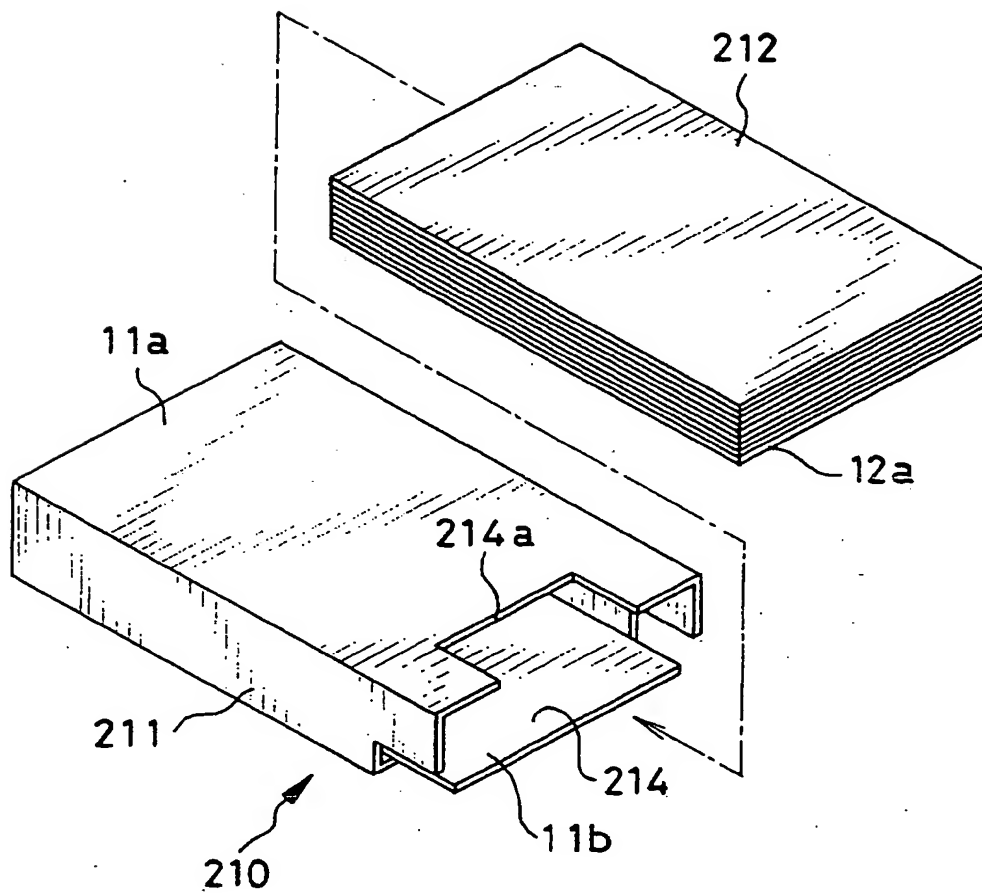


FIG. 26

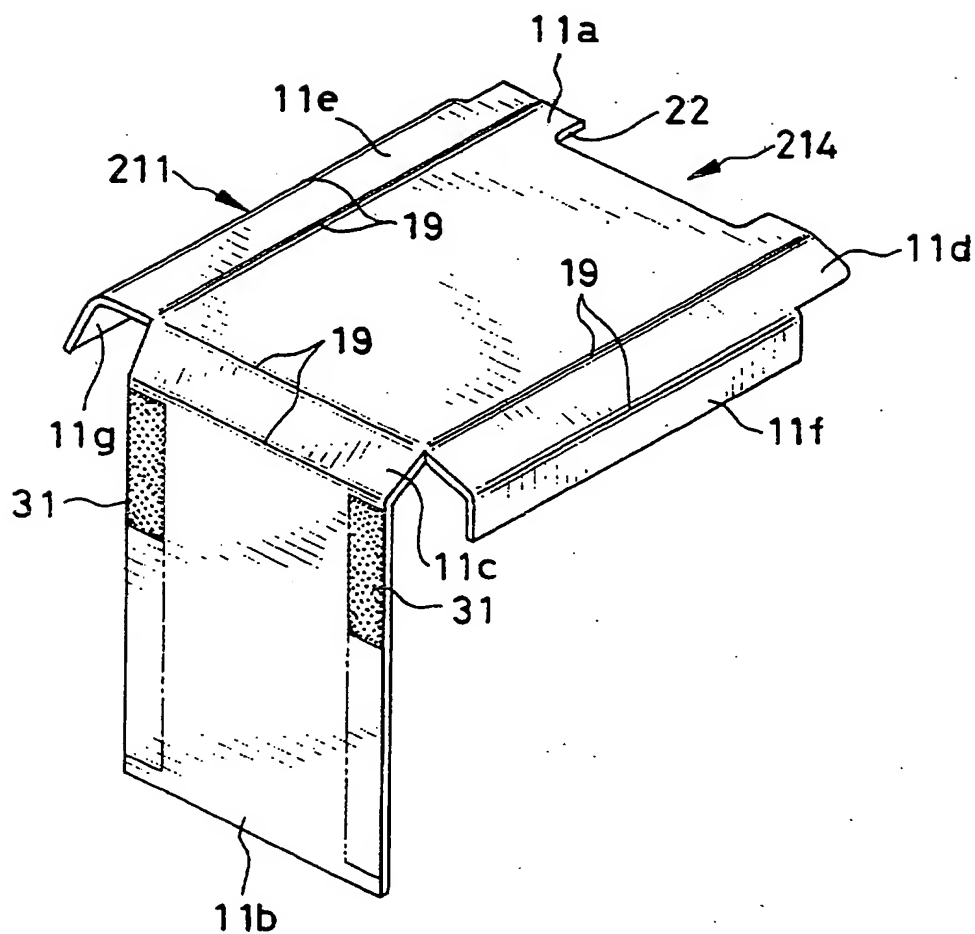


FIG. 27

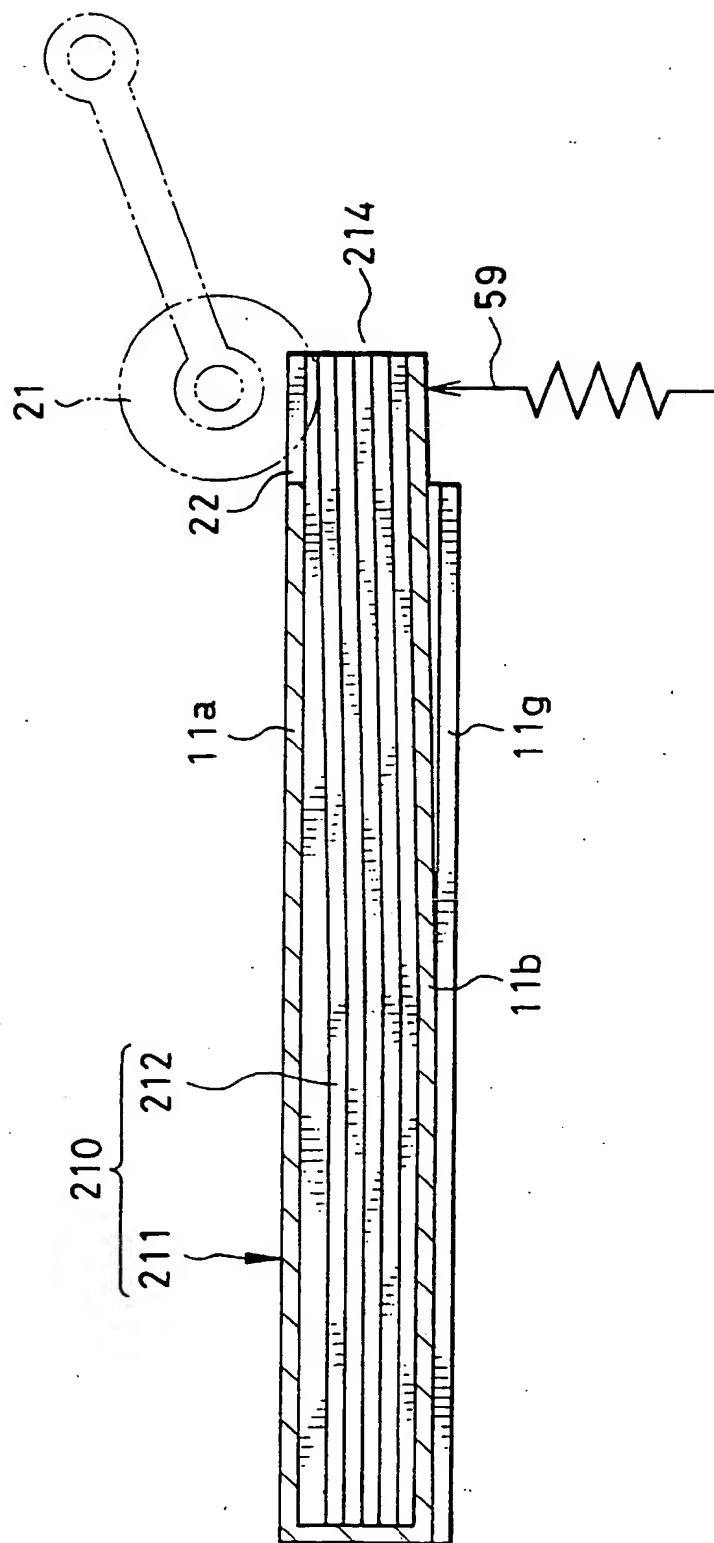


FIG. 28

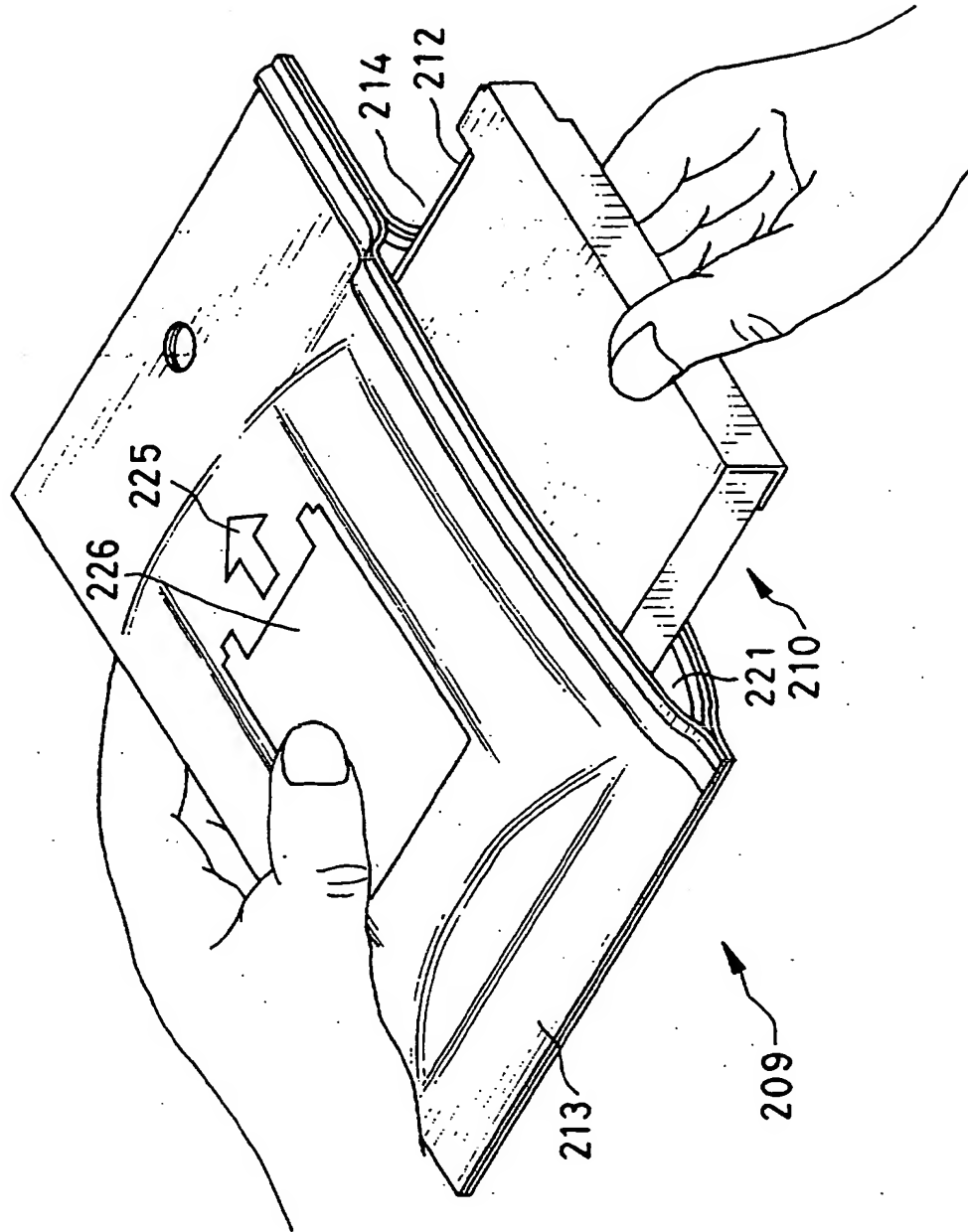


FIG. 29

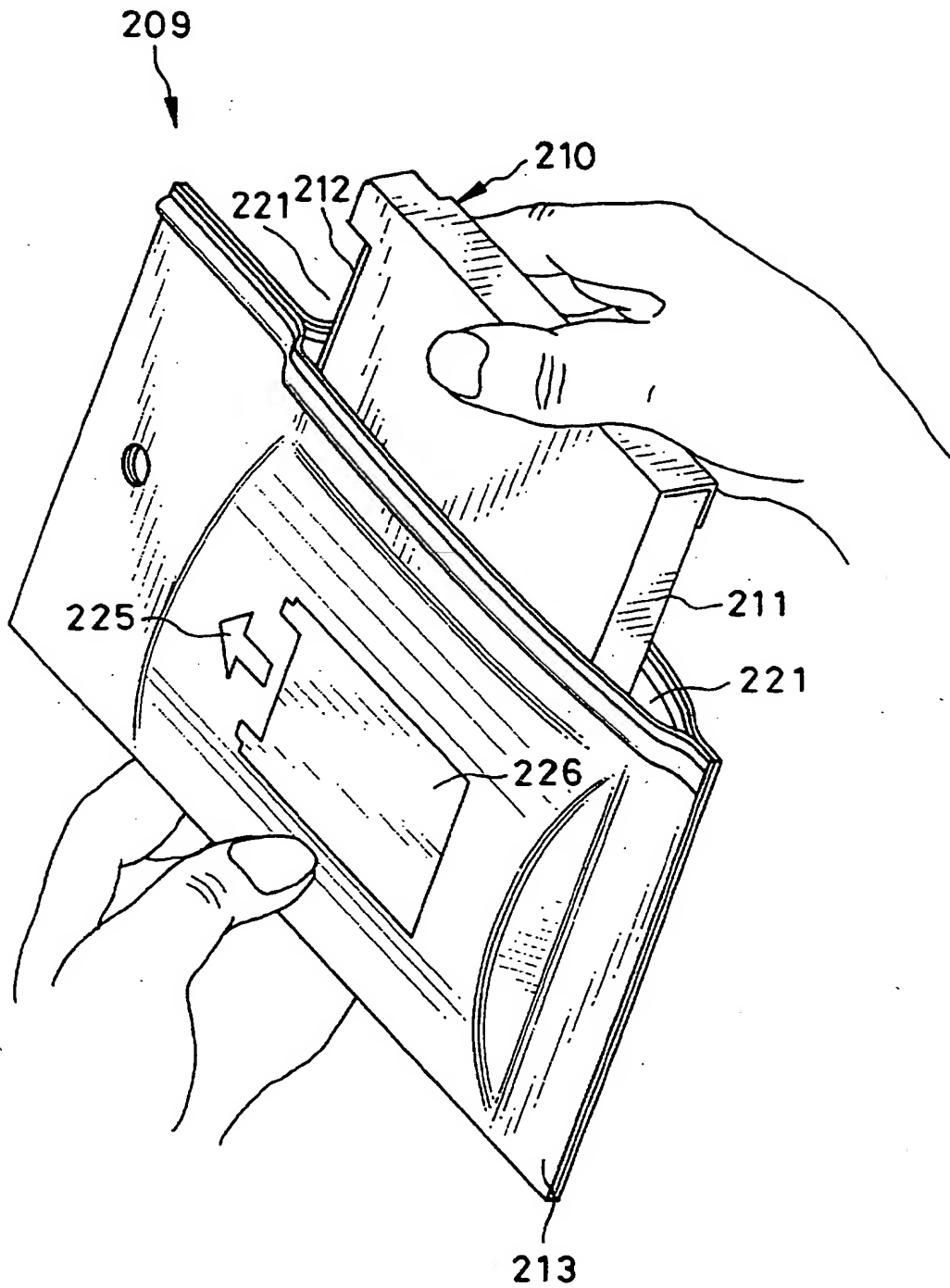


FIG. 30

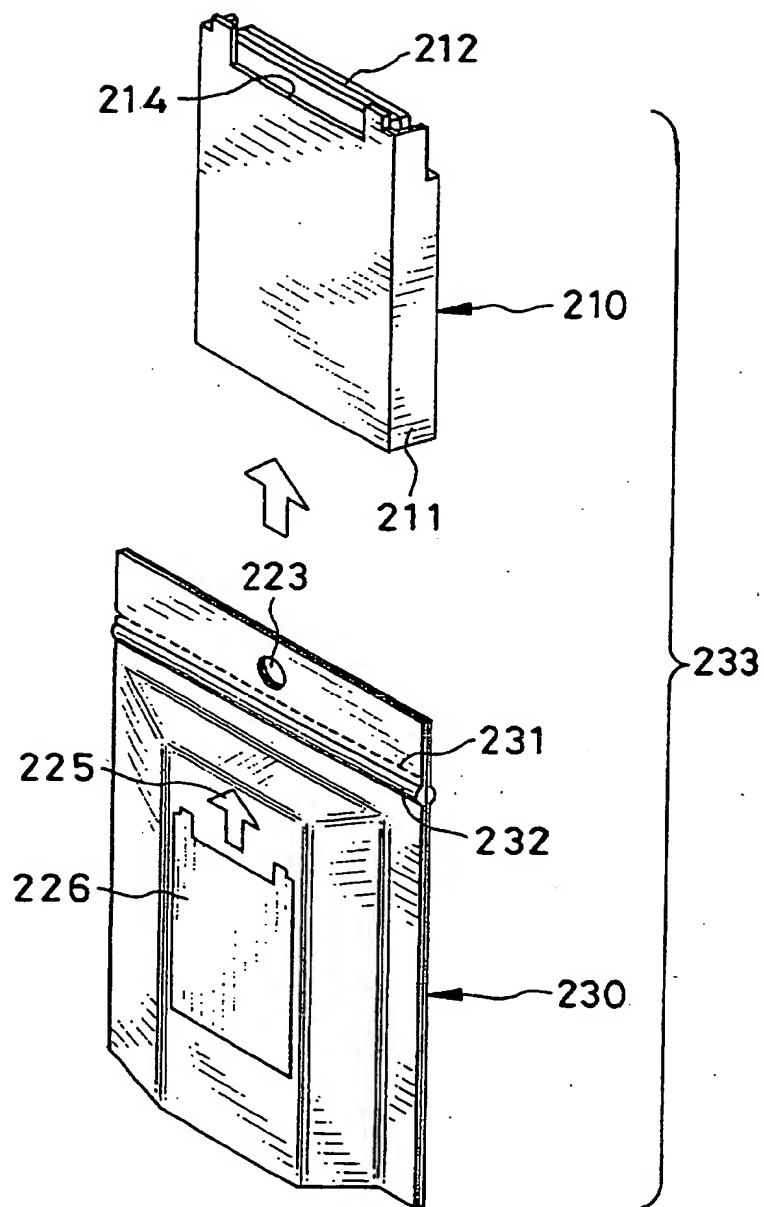


FIG. 31

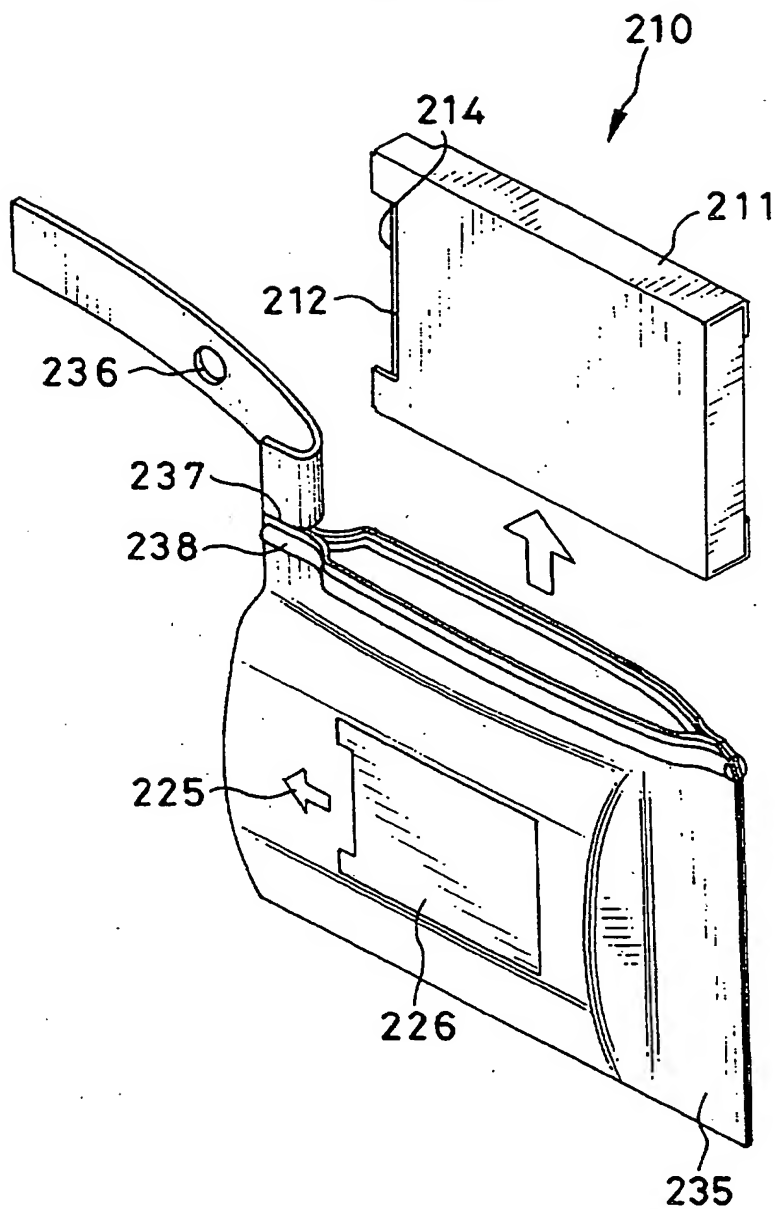


FIG. 32

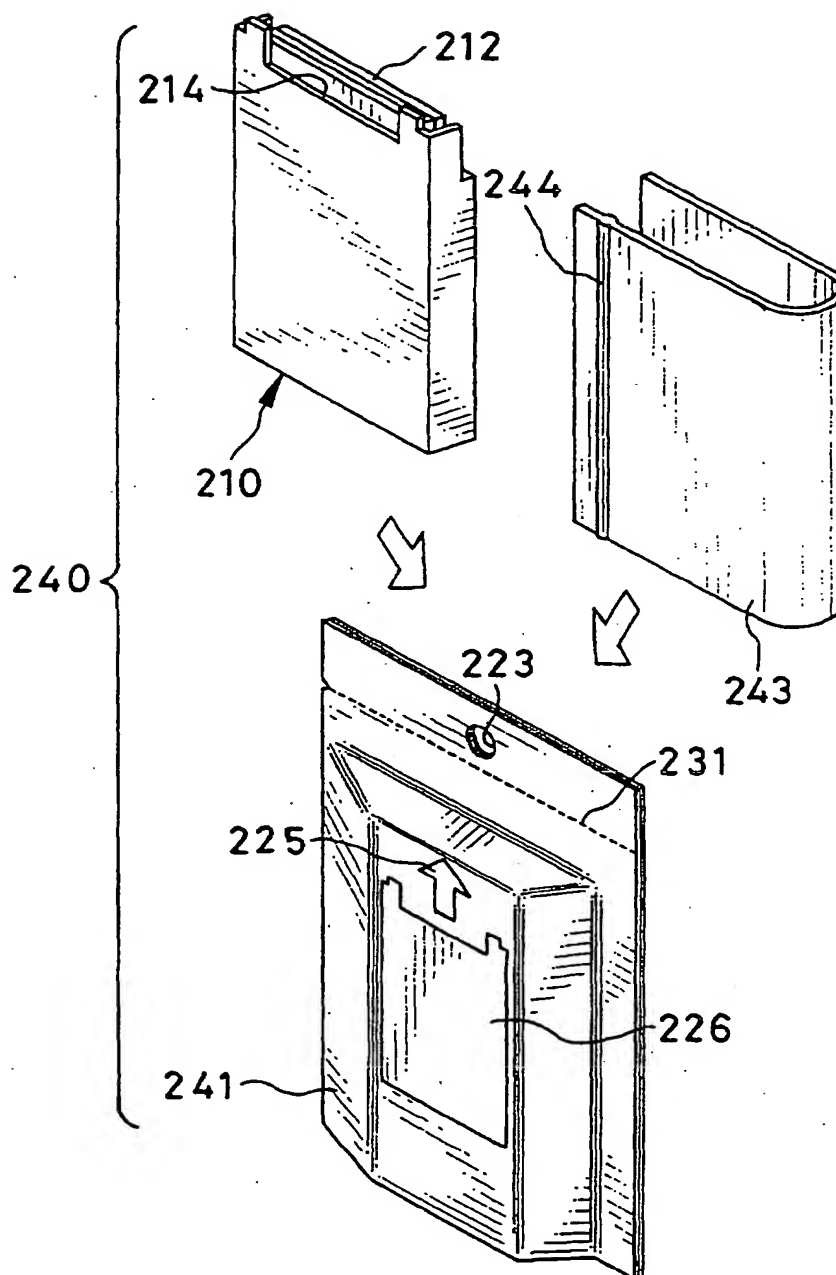


FIG. 33

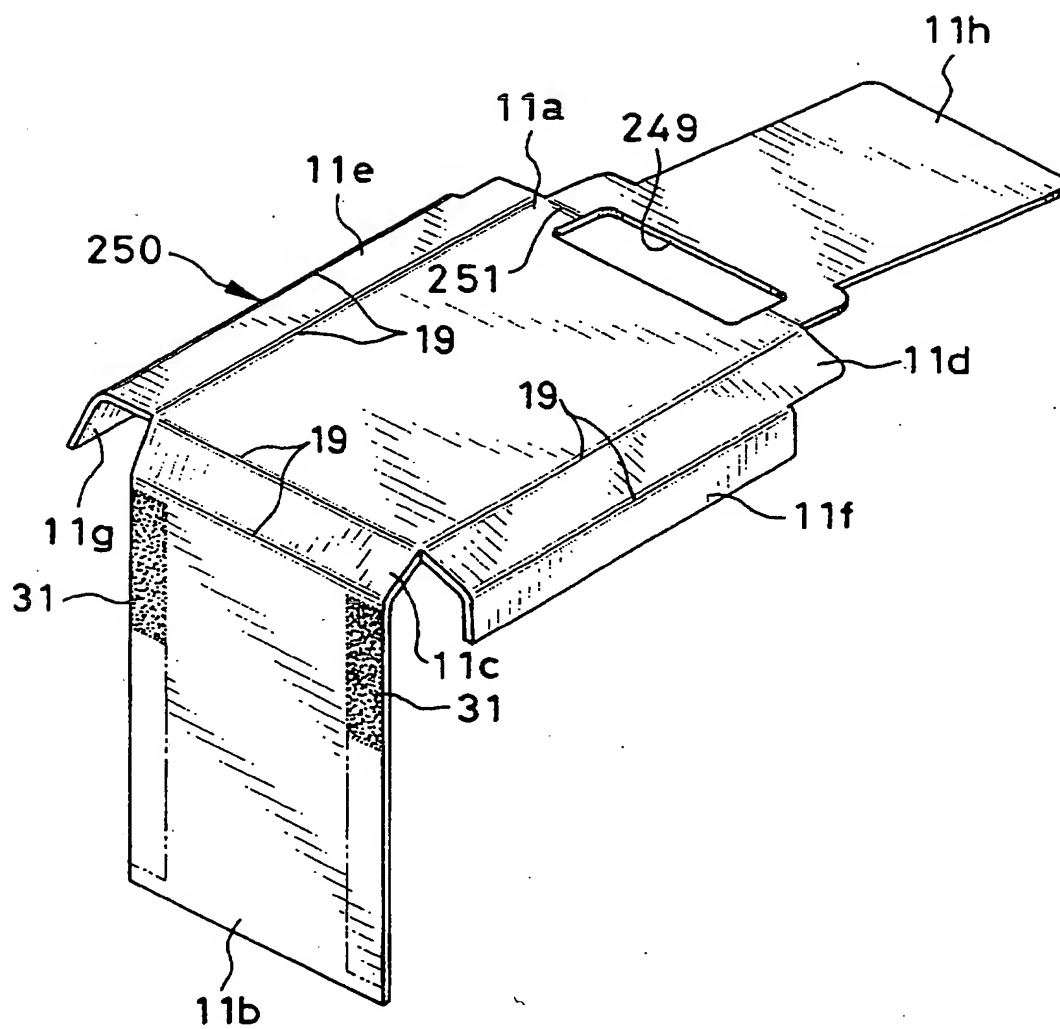


FIG. 34

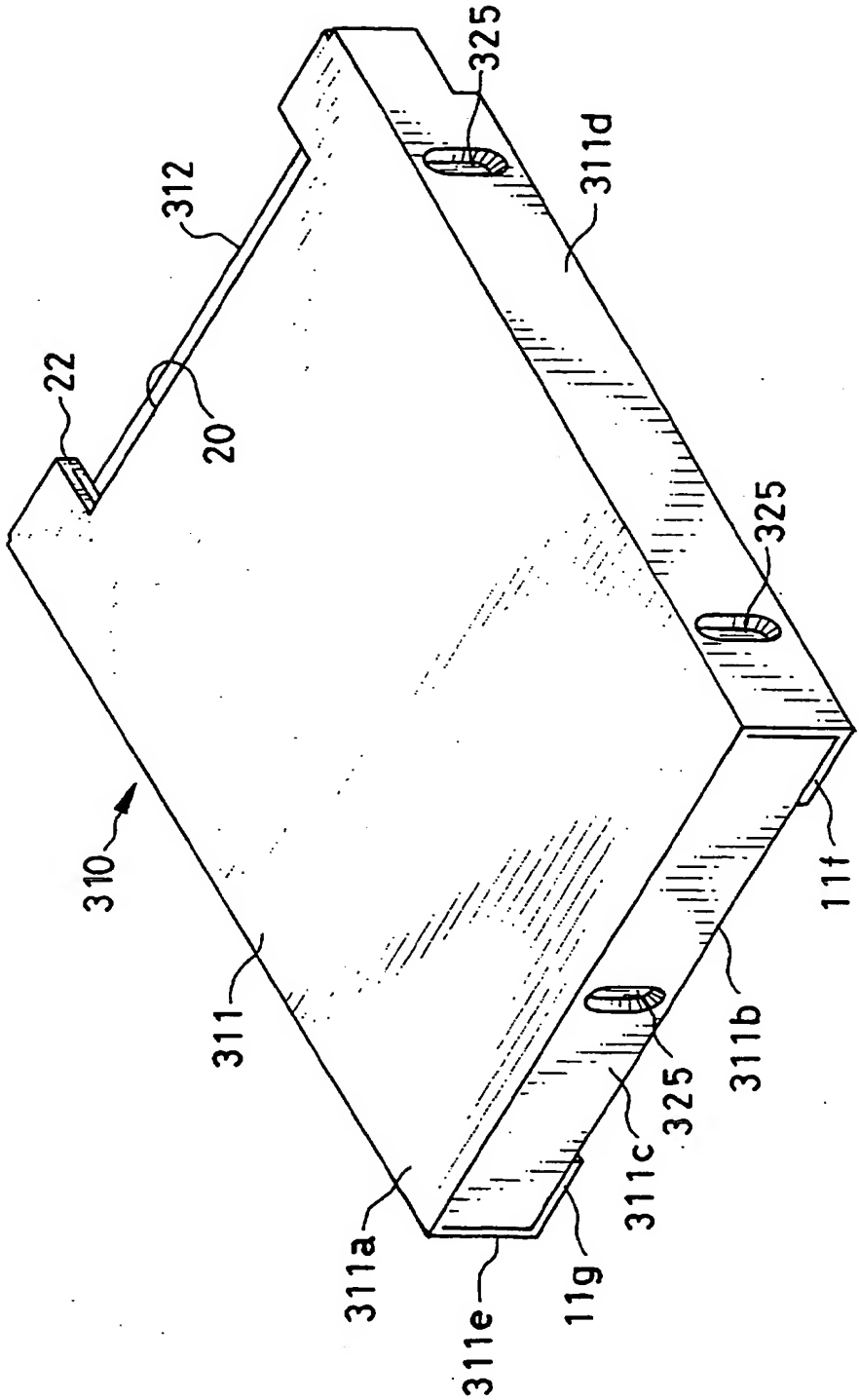


FIG. 35

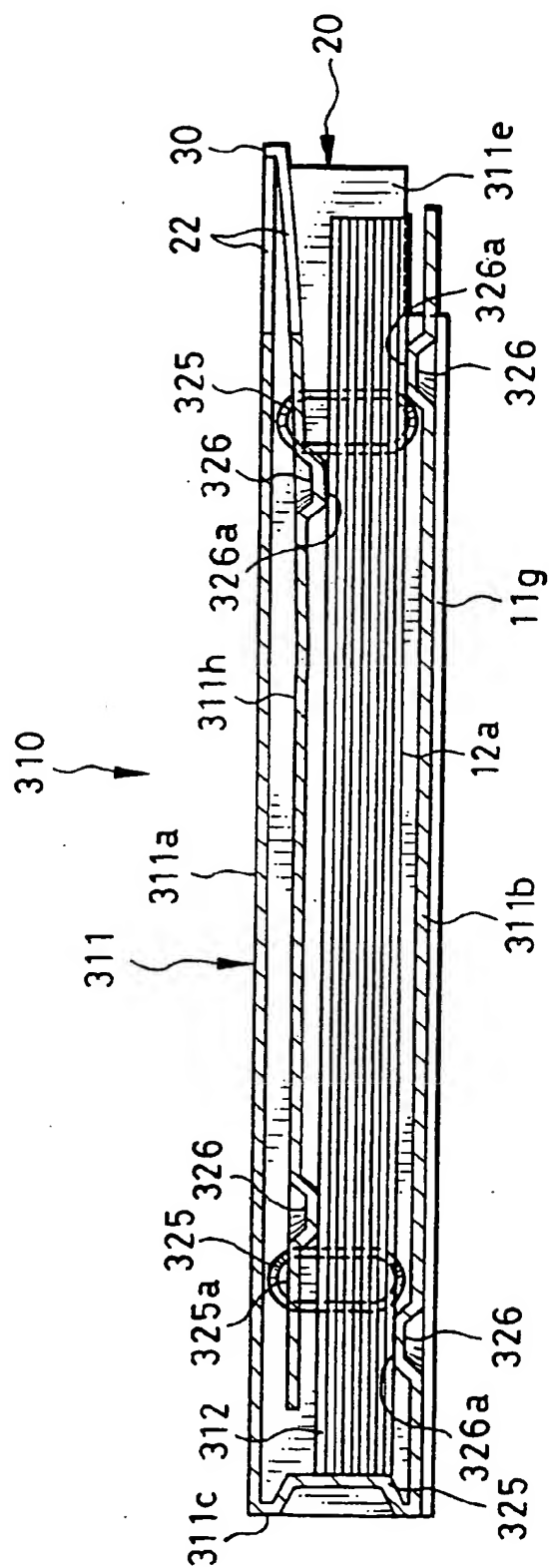


FIG. 36

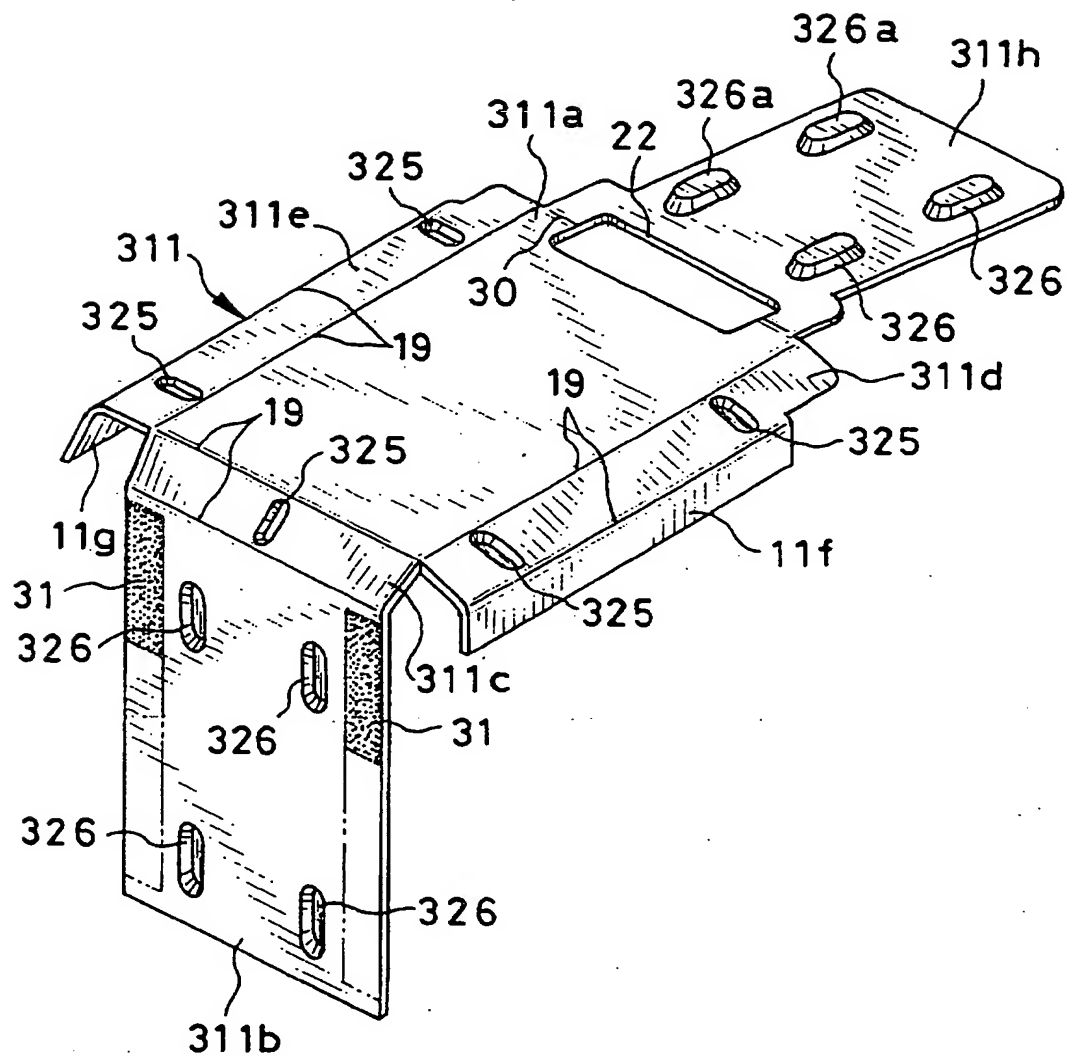


FIG. 37

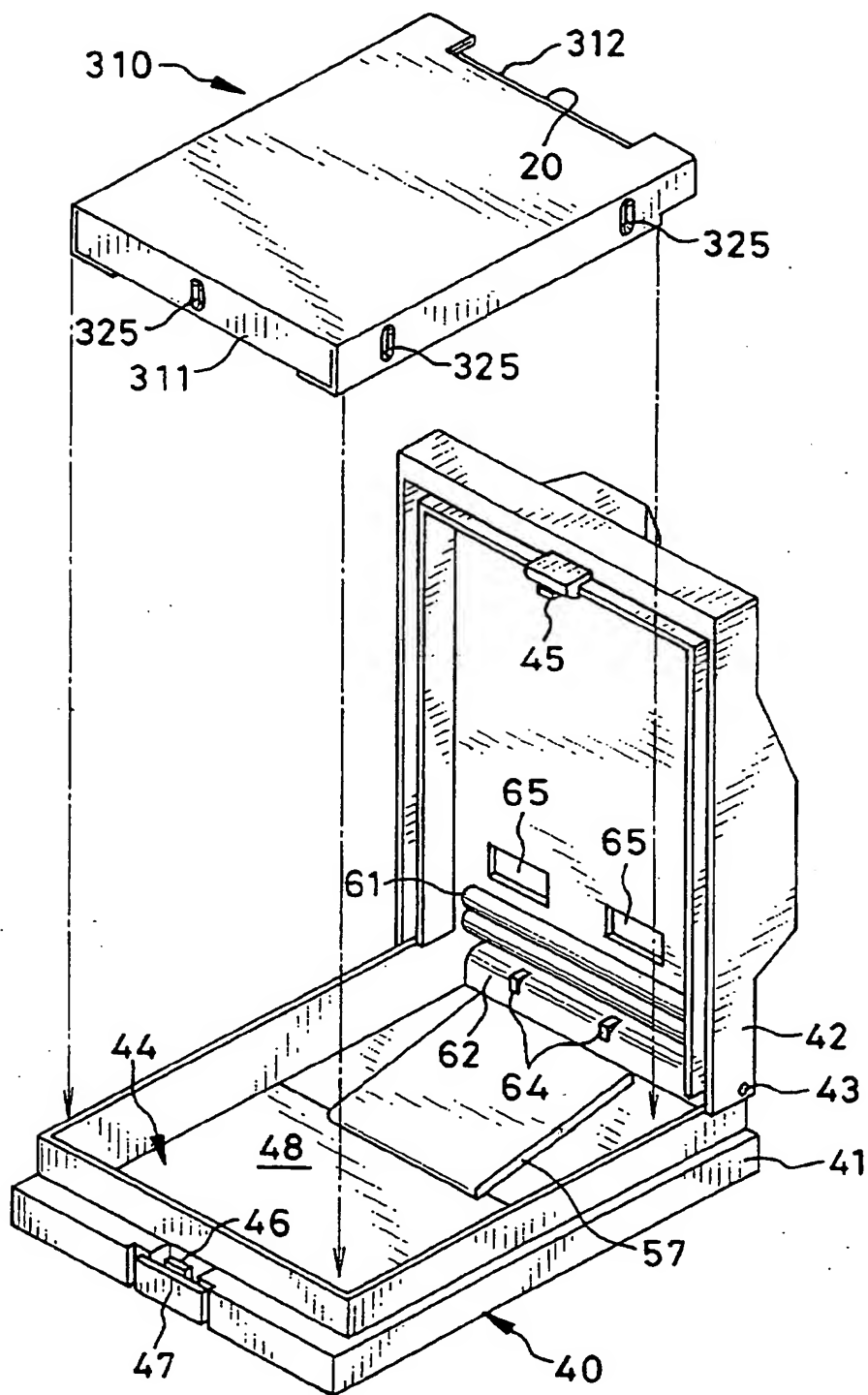


FIG. 38

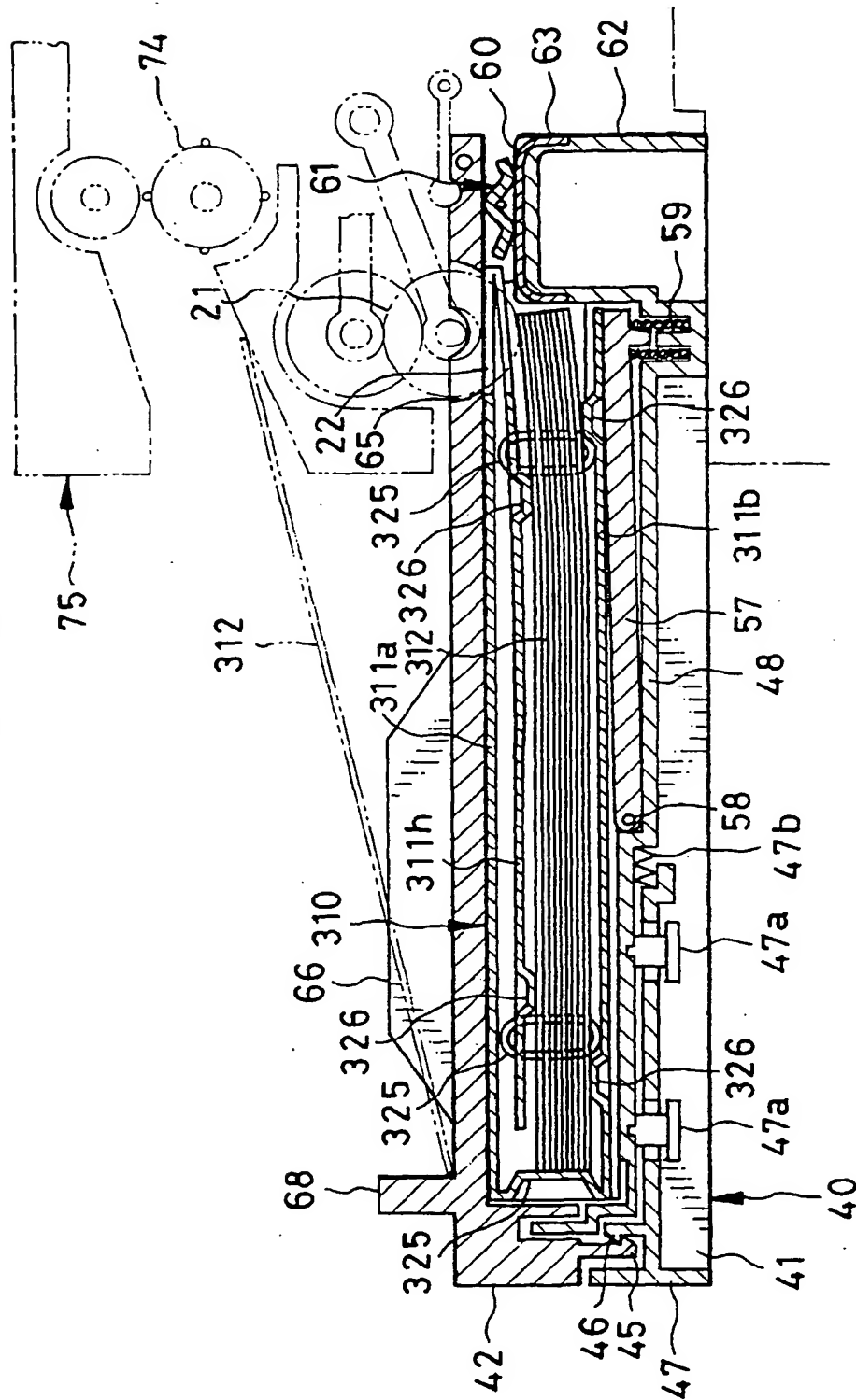


FIG. 39

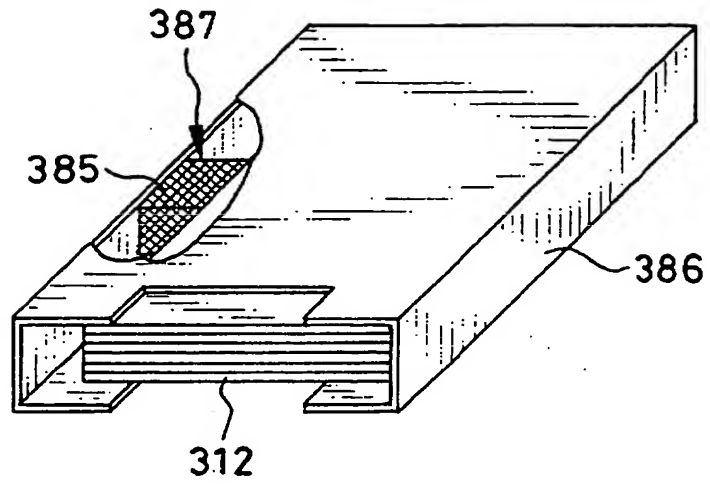


FIG. 40

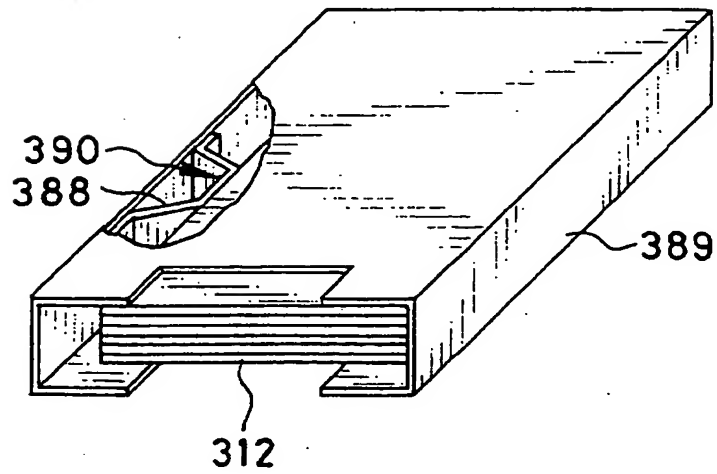


FIG. 41

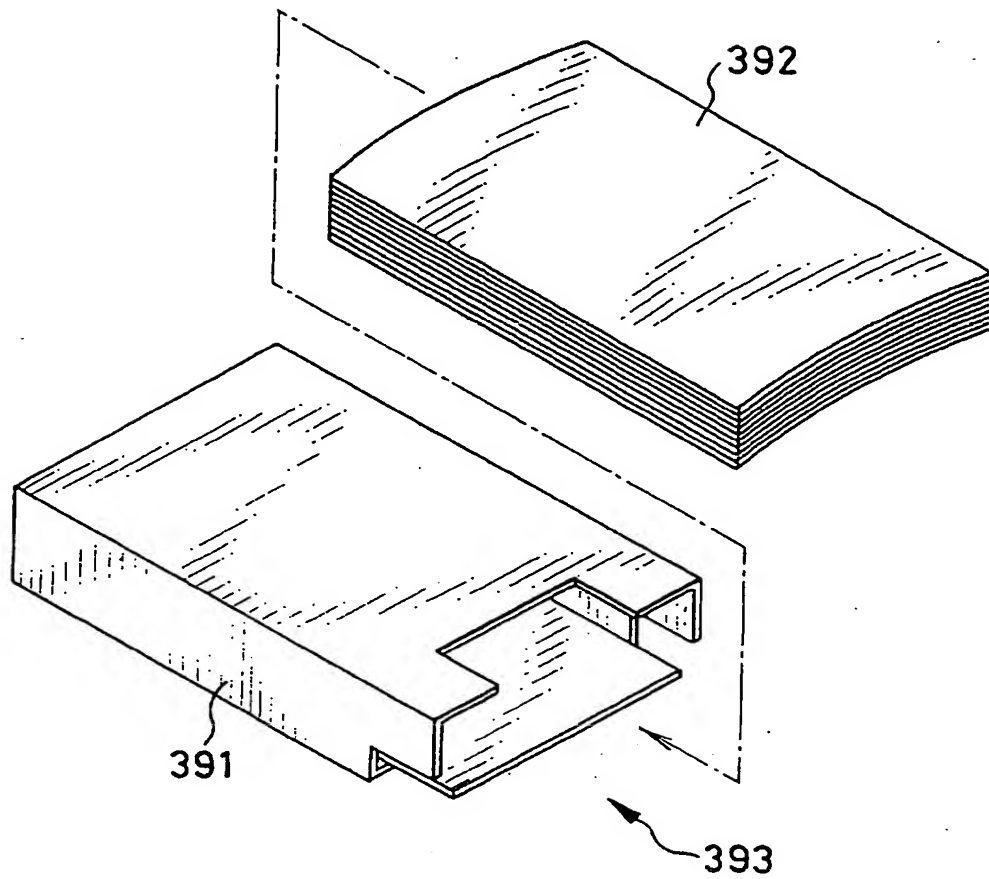
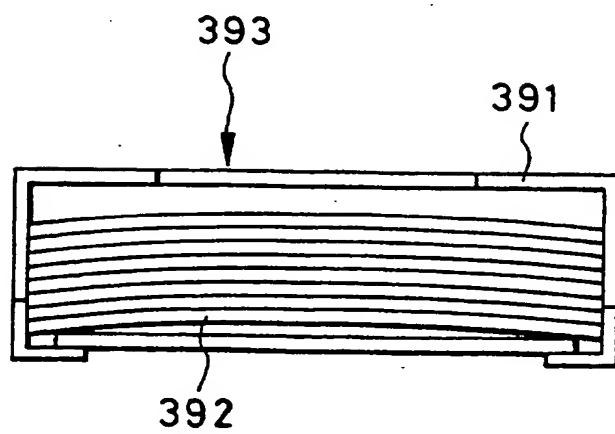


FIG. 42



(19)



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(11)

EP 0 950 532 A3

(12)

EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION

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02.08.2000 Bulletin 2000/31

(51) Int Cl.7: **B41J 13/10**

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20.10.1999 Bulletin 1999/42

(21) Application number: **99302482.7**(22) Date of filing: **30.03.1999**

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MC NL PT SE
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11.05.1998 JP 12786998
21.05.1998 JP 14023798

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Kanagawa-ken (JP)

(72) Inventors:
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Asaka-shi, Saitama (JP)

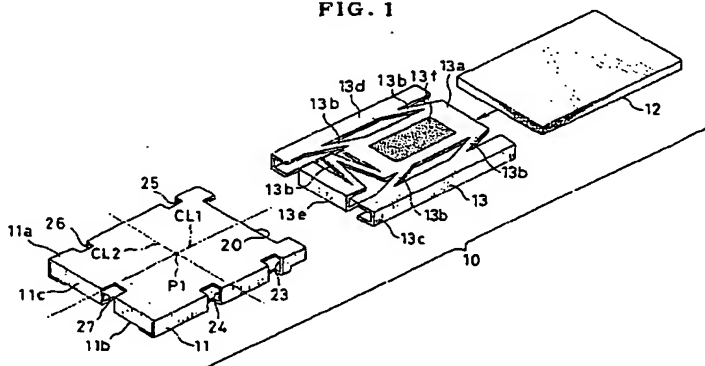
- **Kaya, Akimasa**
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- **Fujishiro, Takeshi**
Asaka-shi, Saitama (JP)
- **Mogi, Shuusuke**
Asaka-shi, Saitama (JP)
- **Ishiduka, Yoshio**
Minami-Ashigara-shi, Kanagawa (JP)

(74) Representative: **Leale, Robin George**
Frank B. Dehn & Co., European Patent Attorneys,
179 Queen Victoria Street
London EC4V 4EL (GB)

(54) Recording sheet package and sheet supply cassette for printer

(57) A thermal printer (75) includes a thermal printer component for image recording to a thermosensitive recording sheet (12). There is a loading opening (77) through which the thermal printer component is supplied with the recording sheet. Plural guiding projections position the recording sheet in the loading opening. A recording sheet package includes a packaging case (11) for containing a stack of plural recording sheets with looseness. The loading opening is loadable with the

packaging case. A package outlet (20) is formed in the packaging case for passage of each recording sheet, and set directed toward the thermal printer component. Plural cutouts (23-27) are formed in a periphery of the packaging case, and receive the guiding projections. Blocking portions (13c-13e) of a blocking frame are disposed inside the packaging case, and close the cutouts. The blocking portions are shiftable inwards from the cutouts by the guiding projections.

FIG. 1



European Patent
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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 99 30 2482

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.6)
X	EP 0 768 566 A (MITSUBISHI ELECTRIC CORP) 16 April 1997 (1997-04-16)	9	B41J13/10
Y	* column 3, line 39 - column 4, line 12; figure 1 *	10	
A	---	1,14,18	
X	PATENT ABSTRACTS OF JAPAN vol. 006, no. 201 (M-163), 13 October 1982 (1982-10-13) & JP 57 107339-A (USAC ELECTRONICS IND CO LTD), 3 July 1982 (1982-07-03) * abstract *	16	
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X	---	27,32,33	
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	US 5 120 044 A (OSWALD ANTON ET AL) 9 June 1992 (1992-06-09) * abstract; figure 2 *		

	-/--		
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search THE HAGUE		Date of completion of the search 25 May 2000	Examiner Wehr, W
<p>CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS</p> <p>X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document</p> <p>T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family; corresponding document</p>			

EPO FORM 1503 03 82 (P04C01)



European Patent
Office

Application Number

EP 99 30 2482

CLAIMS INCURRING FEES

The present European patent application comprised at the time of filing more than ten claims.

☐ Only part of the claims have been paid within the prescribed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for the first ten claims and for those claims for which claims fees have been paid, namely claim(s):

☐ No claims fees have been paid within the prescribed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for the first ten claims.

LACK OF UNITY OF INVENTION

The Search Division considers that the present European patent application does not comply with the requirements of unity of invention and relates to several inventions or groups of inventions, namely:

see sheet B

☒ All further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for all claims.

☐ As all searchable claims could be searched without effort justifying an additional fee, the Search Division did not invite payment of any additional fee.

☐ Only part of the further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for those parts of the European patent application which relate to the inventions in respect of which search fees have been paid, namely claims:

☐ None of the further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for those parts of the European patent application which relate to the invention first mentioned in the claims, namely claims:



European Patent
Office

EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 99 30 2482

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.6)
A	PATENT ABSTRACTS OF JAPAN vol. 018, no. 259 (M-1607), 18 May 1994 (1994-05-18) & JP 06 040150 A (FUJI PHOTO FILM CO LTD), 15 February 1994 (1994-02-15) * abstract *	31,36	
A	US 4 349 186 A (NAKAMURA KUNIHICO) 14 September 1982 (1982-09-14) * abstract; figure 7 *	26	
			TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.6)
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search THE HAGUE		Date of completion of the search 25 May 2000	Examiner Wehr, W
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document		T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document	

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European Patent
Office

LACK OF UNITY OF INVENTION
SHEET B

Application Number
EP 99 30 2482

The Search Division considers that the present European patent application does not comply with the requirements of unity of invention and relates to several inventions or groups of inventions, namely:

1. Claims: 1-26

recording sheet package comprising at least one cutout in the periphery of the packaging case for engagement with a guiding member in a printer; a sheet supply cassette comprising a bias mechanism for pressing recording sheets against a supply roller of a printer; a recording sheet package comprising a position setter, disposed between an inside of said packaging case and the recording sheets; a recording sheet package that keeps recording sheets curved for preventing them from being loose therein

2. Claims: 27-37

a recording sheet package comprising a packaging case for containing a stack of recording sheets and an outer bag for enclosing said packaging case

**ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT
ON EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION NO.**

EP 99 30 2482

This annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned European search report. The members are as contained in the European Patent Office EDP file on
The European Patent Office is in no way liable for these particulars which are merely given for the purpose of information.

25-05-2000

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